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LECTURES

ON THE

HISTORY OF LITERATURE,

ANCIENT AND MODERN.

FROM THE GERMAN OF

FREDERICK SCHLEGEL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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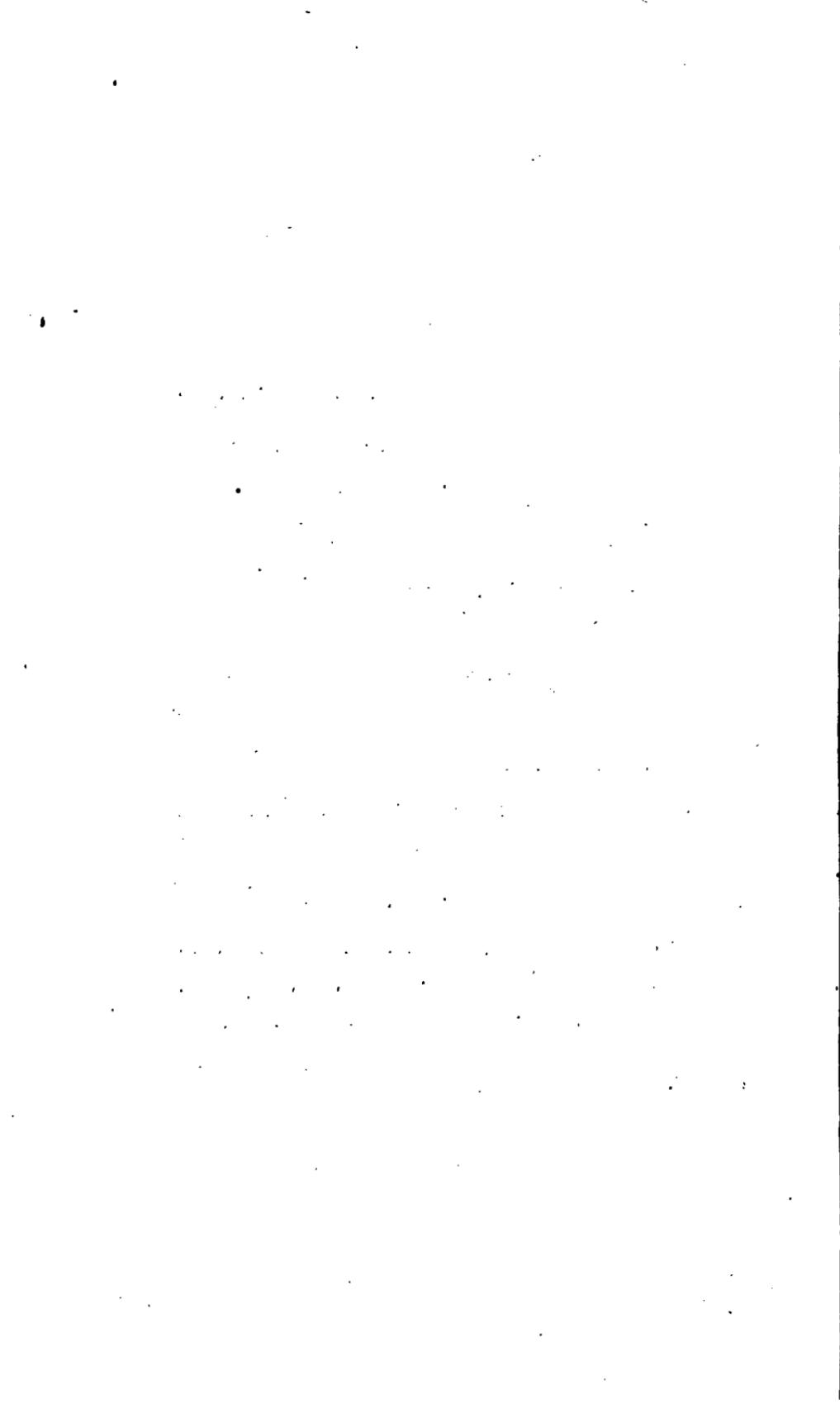
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THE following Lectures were delivered at Vienna in the winter of 1812. They were publiséd by their Author, by way of furnishing German readers with a clue to the general scope and tenor of those opinions which he had before expressed in a variety of Historical and Critical Essays. It is believed that none of **FREDERICK SCHLEGEL**'s writings have ever before been translated into English; but the name of his brother **AUGUSTUS WILLIAM SCHLEGEL**, who has been his coadjutor in the conduct of almost all his works, is now as much respected, both in France and England, as it has long been in Germany.



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LECTURES

ON THE

HISTORY OF LITERATURE.

LECTURE I.

INTRODUCTION AND PLAN OF THE WHOLE WORK—INFLUENCE OF LITERATURE ON LIFE AND ON THE CHARACTER OF NATIONS—POETRY OF THE GREEKS DOWN TO THE AGE OF SOPHOCLES.

IN the following discourses, it is my design to give a general view of the developement and of the spirit of literature among the most illustrious nations of ancient as well as of modern times; but my principal object is to represent literature as it has exerted its influence on the affairs of active life, on the fate of nations, and on the progressive character of ages.

During the last hundred years, the human mind, more particularly in Germany, has undergone a great, and, in one point of view at least, a fortunate alteration. Not that the individual productions of art,

or inquiries into science, to which this period has given birth, are entitled to indiscriminate praise, or have attained equal success; but a mighty change has taken place in the quarter where it was most necessary, in the regard and interest which the world at large bestows on literature; and among us, above all other people, in the influence which it has already exerted, and is likely in a much greater degree to exert on us, both as individuals and as a nation.

Our men of letters formed, till of late, a body altogether cut off from the rest of the world, and quite as distinct from the society of the higher orders as these were from the mass of the people. Keppler and Leibnitz composed far the greater part of their works in Latin; and Frederick of Prussia, in his turn, both of thinking and of writing, was a Frenchman. All national recollections, and all national feelings, were either abandoned to the common people, who still maintained among them some remnant, however feeble and mutilated, of the spirit of "the good old time;" or formed in secret the inspiration and the enthusiastic pursuit of a few poets and authors, who at first indeed applied themselves to these objects in the hope of bringing about a new state of things by their means. So long, however, as this was alone attempted by some particular classes of society, there could be little chance that the youthful enthusiasm of their design should be justi-

fied by success, or crowned by consequences of universal utility.

During the whole of the latter part of the seventeenth, and the first half of the eighteenth century, this complete separation between the men of letters and the people of fashion, and between them and the rest of the nation, was universal throughout Germany; and, indeed, these unnatural distinctions and their necessary consequences protracted no inconsiderable influence in particular quarters, long after the general mind had become sufficiently prepared for the reception of a new state of things, and a more rational arrangement of society.

The great number of distinguished works, or at least of remarkable and praiseworthy attempts, which, especially after the middle of the eighteenth century, were perpetually making their appearance in the German tongue, succeeded, at length, in attracting universal attention, partly to the too much neglected history of our country, and to the many beautiful traits of magnanimity and virtue which are related in our ancient chronicles; partly to the innate excellencies of our language itself,—the strength, the richness, and the flexibility which it never fails to display, when it is employed in a manner adapted to its character. The more that national feelings and recollections were revived, the more also was our love awakened for our mother tongue. That ac-

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quaintance with foreign languages, whether dead or living, which is necessary for men of letters and men of fashion, was no longer connected with neglect of their vernacular speech; a neglect which is always sure to work its own revenge on those who practise it, and which can never be supposed to create any prejudice either in favour of their politeness or their erudition. The great attention with which foreign languages had been studied, was, however, at this period, of infinite advantage to our own; for every foreign language, even a living one, must of necessity be acquired in a more exact manner than our vernacular tongue. Thus the mind becomes sharpened for the perception of the general principles of language; and in the end we apply to the polishing and enriching of our own language that acuteness which we have been accustomed to exercise on others. It has become, in a word, the great object of general ambition to add to the strength and the variety, which are the distinguishing excellencies of our native tongue, all those other advantages which characterise the most cultivated languages of ancient as well as of modern times.

It is, however, my purpose to exhibit a picture not of German literature alone, but of the literature of the European nations in general. There cannot therefore be any impropriety in anticipating the remark, that during the eighteenth century, the li-

terature of many other countries underwent a change similar to that which took place in our own, and manifested the same disposition to resume those national characteristics, and that national spirit which it had been the ambition of the preceding period, as much as possible, to obliterate. The example of England will sufficiently illustrate my meaning. Even there, during the latter part of the seventeenth century, while the country lay exhausted and drooping under the consequences of the civil wars of Cromwell, the public taste became corrupted, insipid, tame, sickly, and un-English. The language itself was neglected, and the great old poets and authors were sinking fast into oblivion. But so soon as by a fortunate revolution, the political independence of England came again to be displayed, her national literature also began to revive. The French taste, which the English had adopted, became every day weaker; and they recurred at last, with redoubled affection, to the old poets of their country. It became an object of much study to preserve their language in all its strength and integrity; a number of great writers arose; and since that time, so strong and so unchanging have been their care and partiality for every monument, and every relic, however minute, of British history and British antiquities, that, so far as this matter is concerned, we can reproach their

national character with only the one glorious fault of a too exclusive admiration of their country.

A separation, such as I have mentioned, between the men of letters and the courtly society, and again between both of these and the common people, is destructive of all national character. It is necessary that the different natural circumstances and situations of the various classes of mankind, should, in a certain degree, work together, before we can either attain, or enjoy excellence in the productions of mind. Where was there ever any work entitled to be called truly perfect, in the formation of which the strength and enthusiasm of youth have not laboured in companionship with the experience and maturity of manhood? Even the tenderness of womanly feeling must not be excluded from exerting its due influence on the works of literature; because, when the character of a nation is once truly formed, that noble sense of delicacy which is peculiar to the sex, may do much towards maintaining it in its purity, and preventing it from overstepping the limits of the beautiful. There are only two common principles on which every work of imagination must more or less proceed; *first*, On the expression of those feelings which are common to all men of elevated thinking; and, *secondly*, On those patriotic feelings and associations peculiar to the people in whose language it is composed, and

on whom it is to exert its nearest and most powerful influence.

That the formation of a national character requires a combination of all those powers and faculties, which we but too often keep distinct and isolated, is a truth which has at least begun to be felt. The learning of the philosopher,—the acuteness and promptitude of the man of business,—the earnestness and enthusiasm of the solitary artist,—that lightness and flexibility of mental impression, and every fleeting delicacy which we can only find, and learn to find, in the intercourse of society; all these are now brought somewhat into contact with each other, or at least do not stand aloof in such total separation as of old.

But however much literature has of late gained in most countries, by becoming more national, more spirited, and more connected with the affairs of life, the evil of which I have complained, is yet far from being altogether removed. In Germany we may still, on many occasions, see literature and active life stand separated like two different worlds, having no influence on each other. If all the individual varieties of mental exertion, and mental production (which we class under the common name of literature,) be not in a great measure lost to the world; at least they are far, very far, from exerting their due influence on us, either as individuals or as

a nation. Let us only contemplate for a moment the actual state of literature, but particularly those causes which are most powerful in their influence on literature itself, and on the estimation in which it is generally held.

It seems to be considered as a common right to all poets and artists, to live only in the world of their own thoughts, and to be quite unfitted for the world which other men inhabit. Concerning the man of erudition, it is a maxim in every mouth that he is a being of no practical utility. Every one mistrusts the skill of the orator, and imagines that he has the power to bend the truth to his own purposes, with the design of deceiving and misleading us. That philosophy is often more apt to lead an age wrong, and betray it into the most unfortunate errors, than really to enlighten and maintain it in the truth, is sufficiently manifest from our own experience and the history of the present age. Through the reciprocal animosities and complaints of philosophers themselves, it has become commonly known, even among the uninitiated, how seldom they are in good understanding with each other; and from this circumstance, the opinion has gone abroad that, in general, philosophical tenets exert no practical influence on those who maintain them, and that philosophers, like other men, more frequently accommodate their

opinions to their desires, than their desires to their opinions. Yet nothing can be more irrational than to endeavour to bring into discredit the noblest struggle which it is in the power of man to make,—the struggle after knowledge in the investigation of truth, merely on account of the general difficulty of the undertaking, and the ill success or ill conduct of particular inquirers. There is indeed no occasion to wonder that men, perpetually occupied with the weighty affairs of political and of active life, should consider the petty disputes of writers as a mere spectacle of amusement, neither very interesting nor very important. Even the countless number of books must produce, in the greater proportion of readers, such a feeling of satiety, that nothing can appear more completely trifling, superfluous, and unprofitable, than a new book, adding one more to the heap of authors whom they have already in their hands. In this sketch, however, I have omitted to notice that, in my opinion, writers of all sorts, poets, learned men, and artists, are themselves the cause of a great share of that contempt of literature which is so prevalent throughout the world; for this reason, that they very seldom speak their mind freely and decidedly on the subject. But even if all the reproaches which are commonly cast on authors and their works were, on the whole, just and well-

founded, will any one deny that there are at least glorious exceptions to the rule,—works both of learning and of genius, which in relation to the world in general, to their country, and to the age, fulfil every wish that could be formed, and are in all respects absolute and perfect? And if this be so, why are men so slow to recognise the absurdity of this general neglect, which has no better logic to support it than that which throws the blame of partial and temporary abuses of literature, on the essence of literature itself, a thing every way so great and so important? Or why do they persist in keeping literary men in a state of separation from the world at large,—a situation from which so many of their errors and defects are, in all probability, derived?

But in order to discover with perfect clearness and precision the importance of literature, both in its original destination, and in the power which it certainly exerts on the worth and welfare of nations, let us for a moment consider it under both of these aspects. And, in the first place, let us regard the true nature and object, the wide extent, and original dignity of literature. Under this name, then, I comprehend all those arts and sciences, and all those mental exertions which have human life, and man himself, for their object; but which, manifesting themselves in no external effect, energise only in

thought and speech, and without requiring any corporeal matter on which to operate, display intellect as embodied in written language. Under this are included, first, the art of poetry, and the kindred art of narration or history; next, all those higher exertions of pure reason and intellect which have human life and man himself for their object, and which have influence upon both; and, last of all, eloquence and wit, whenever these do not escape in the fleeting vehicle of oral communication, but remain displayed in the more substantial and lasting form of written productions. And when I have enumerated these, I imagine I have comprehended almost every thing which can enter into the composition of the intellectual life of man.—With the single exception of reason,—and even reason can scarcely operate without the intervention of language—is there any thing more important to man, more peculiar to him, or more inseparable from his nature than speech? Nature indeed could not have bestowed on us a gift more precious than the human voice, which, possessing sounds for the expression of every feeling, and being capable of distinctions as minute, and combinations as intricate, as the most complex instrument of music, is thus enabled to furnish materials so admirable for the formation of artificial language. The greatest and most important discovery of human ingenuity is writing; there is no impiety in saying that it was

scarcely in the power of the Deity to confer on man a more glorious present than LANGUAGE, by the medium of which he himself has been revealed to us, and which affords at once the strongest bond of union, and the best instrument of communication. So inseparable indeed are mind and language, so identically one are thought and speech, that although we must always hold reason to be the great characteristic and peculiar attribute of man, yet language also, when we regard its original object and intrinsic dignity, is well entitled to be considered as a component part of the intellectual structure of our being. And although, in strict application and rigid expression, thought and speech always are, and always must be regarded as two things metaphysically distinct,—yet there only can we find these two elements in disunion, where one or both have been employed imperfectly or amiss. Nay such is the effect of the original union or identity that, in their most extensive varieties of application, they can never be totally disunited, but must always remain inseparable, and every where be exerted in combination,

However greatly both of these high gifts, which are so essentially the same,—these, the proudest distinctions of human nature, which have made man what he is, may be in many instances misdirected and abused; still our innate and indestructible sense of the original dignity of speech and language, is

sufficiently manifest, from the importance which we attach to them, in the formation of all our particular judgments and opinions. What influence the art of speaking has upon our judgment in the affairs of active life, and in all the relations of society,—what power the force of expression every where exerts over our thoughts, it would be superfluous to detail. The same considerations which govern us in our judgment of individuals, determine us also in our opinions concerning nations; and we are at once disposed to look upon that people as the most enlightened and the most polished, which makes use of the most clear, precise, appropriate, and agreeable medium of expression: insomuch, that we not unfrequently allow ourselves to be biassed even to weakness by the external advantage of diction and utterance, and pay more attention to the vehicle than to the intrinsic value of the thoughts themselves, or the moral character of those from whom they proceed. Nor do we form our opinions in this manner concerning those individuals alone, and those people who reside in our vicinity, or with whom we are personally acquainted; but we apply the same standard to those who are removed to the greatest distance from us, both in time and situation. Let us take, for instance, the example of a people which we have always been accustomed to class under the general epithet of barbarians. So soon as some ob-

serving traveller makes himself acquainted with their language, this unfavourable opinion begins essentially to be changed. ‘ Barbarians !’ he will say ‘ they are indeed barbarians, for they are unacquainted with our arts and our refinements, as well as with those moral evils which are so often their consequences ; but it is at least impossible to deny that they possess a sound and strong understanding, and a natural acuteness, which we cannot observe without admiration. Their brief replies are most touching, and not unfrequently display a native vein of wit. Their language is powerful and expressive, and possesses the most marked clearness and precision.’ Thus in all situations, and in all affairs, we are accustomed and compelled to reason from language to intellect, and from the expression to the thought. But these are only solitary examples in solitary cases.

The true excellence and importance of those arts and sciences which exert and display themselves in writing, may be seen, in a more general point of view, in the great influence which they have exerted on the character and fate of nations, throughout the history of the world. Here it is that literature appears in all its reach and comprehension, as the epitome of all the intellectual capabilities and progressive improvements of mankind. If we look back to the history of our species, and observe what circumstances have

given to any one nation the greatest advantages over others, we shall not, I think, hesitate to admit that there is nothing so necessary to the whole improvement, or rather to the whole intellectual existence of a nation, as the possession of a plentiful store of those national recollections and associations, which are lost in a great measure during the dark ages of infant society, but which it forms the great object of the poetical art to perpetuate and adorn. Such national recollections, the noblest inheritance which a people can possess, bestow an advantage which no other riches can supply; for when a people are exalted in their feelings, and ennobled in their own estimation, by the consciousness that they have been illustrious in ages that are gone by,—that these recollections have come down to them from a remote and a heroic ancestry,—in a word, that they have *a national poetry* of their own, we are willing to acknowledge that their pride is reasonable, and they are raised in our eyes by the same circumstance which gives them elevation in their own. It is not from the extent of its undertakings alone, or from the remarkable nature of the incidents of its history, that we judge of the character and importance of a nation. Many a nation, which has undergone in its time all the varieties of human fortune, has sunk nameless into oblivion, and left behind scarcely a trace of its existence. Others, more fortunate, have transmitted

to posterity the memory of their influences, and the fame of their conquests; and yet we scarcely hold the narrative to be worthy of our attention, unless the spirit of the nation has been such as to communicate *its* interest to those undertakings and those incidents which at best occupy but too great a space in the history of the world. Remarkable actions, great events, and strange catastrophes, are not of themselves sufficient to preserve the admiration and determine the judgment of posterity. These are only to be attained by a nation who have given clear proofs that they were not insensible instruments in the hands of destiny, but were themselves conscious of the greatness of their deeds and the singularity of their fortunes. This national consciousness, expressing itself in works of narrative and illustration, is HISTORY. A people whose days of glory and victory have been celebrated by the pen of a Livy, whose misfortunes and decline have been bequeathed to posterity in the pages of a Tacitus, acquires a strange pre-eminence by the genius of her historians, and is no longer in any danger of being classed with the vulgar multitude of nations which, occupying no place in the history of human intellect, as soon as they have performed their part of conquest or defeat on the stage of the world, pass away from our view, and sink for ever into oblivion. The

poet, the painter, or the sculptor, though endued with all the power and all the magic of his art,—though capable of reaching or embodying the boldest flights of imagination;—the philosopher, though he may be able to scrutinise the most hidden depth of human thought (rare as these attainments may be, and few equals as he may find in the society with which he is surrounded), can, during the period of his own life, be known and appreciated only by a few. But the sphere of his influence extends with the progress of ages, and his name shines brighter and broader as it grows old. Compared with his, the fame of the legislator, among distant nations, and the celebrity of new institutions, appears uncertain and obscure; while the glory of the conqueror, after a few centuries have sunk into the all-whelming, all-destroying abyss of time, is for ever fading in its lustre, until at length it perhaps affords a subject of exultation to some plodding antiquarian, that he should be able to discover some glimmerings of a name which had once challenged the reverence of the world. It may safely be affirmed, that not only among the moderns, but even in the later ages of antiquity, the preservation and extension of the fame of Greece were at least as much the work of Homer and Plato, as of Solon and Alexander. The tribute of attention which all the European nations

so willingly pay to the history of the Greeks, as the authors and examples of European refinement, is in truth more rightly due to the philosopher and the poet, than to the conqueror and the legislator. The influence which the works and the genius of Homer have of themselves produced on after ages, or rather indeed on the general character and improvement of the human race, has alone been far more durable, and far more extensive, than the combined effects of all the institutions of the Athenian, and all the heroic deeds and transcendent victories of the Macedonian. In truth, if Solon and Alexander still continue to be glorious and immortal names, their glory and immortality are to be traced rather to the influence which, by certain accidents, their genius has exerted on the intellectual character and progress of the species, than to the intrinsic value of a system of municipal laws altogether discrepant from our own, or to the establishment of a few dynasties which have long since passed away.

We must not indeed expect to find many poets or many philosophers whose genius or whose celebrity have in any degree entitled them to be compared with Homer and Plato. But wherever one is to be found, he, like them, is deservedly valued by posterity as a solitary light in the midst of darkness, a sure index and a common standard,

by which we may form an estimate of the intellectual power and refinement of the age and nation which gave him birth.

If to these high advantages of a national poetry and national traditions, of a history abounding in subjects of meditation, of refined art, and profound science, we add the gifts of eloquence, of wit, and of a language of society adapted to all the ends of elegant intercourse, but not abused to the purposes of immorality; we have filled up the picture of a polished and intellectual people, and we have a full view of what a perfect and comprehensive literature ought to be.

Animated as I am by the wish to represent literature in all its importance, and in all the influence which it exerts on the affairs of mankind, I am far from being insensible to the difficulties of the task which I have undertaken. I am well aware that, on one hand, from my desire to be brief and comprehensive, I may be in danger of passing over many things in a cursory, and perhaps an incidental manner, which might well deserve the fullest explanation and detail; while, on the other hand, from my anxiety to establish the justice of my opinions, by a reference to historical facts, I may be apt to dwell on particular points to a length which, by those who have not made literature the great business of their lives, may be esteemed use-

less and unprofitable. I am however encouraged to proceed in my attempt, by the long intimacy in which I have lived with many departments of literature. The ground indeed is so rich and so extensive, that no one who is at all acquainted with its nature can be in much danger of believing himself to have exhausted it. But my familiarity with a subject which has occupied almost the whole of my life, may perhaps be no inadequate preparation for giving a comprehensive sketch of literature as a whole. It should at least enable me to distinguish, with some precision, between what is useful only as a step to something farther, and what possesses in itself the importance of an end ; as well as between those results whose value can be estimated only by the learned, and those which possess qualities calculated to render them interesting in the eyes of the world at large.

The whole of our mental refinement is in so great a degree derived from that of the ancients, that it would be extremely difficult to treat of literature in any way, without bestowing at least a few introductory observations on the writers of Greece and Rome. It would, above all things, be impossible to draw a picture of the progress of literature in general, or to form any estimate of the relative merits of the works which have appeared in our own time, without having previously described, in

some sort, the peculiar excellencies of the great masterpieces of antiquity. The history of Greece, beyond that of any other country, affords the most striking illustration of the strength and beauty to which literature may attain, when its progress is fostered by the public care of an ingenious and lively people; and, in a different period of the same eventful story, the poisonous influence, and destructive consequences of a sophistical eloquence, are displayed with a power and a clearness for which we should elsewhere seek in vain.

The view which I propose to take of antiquity shall, however, be short and compressed, however much I might be tempted to extend my account of the literature of nations, to whom we are indebted for so large a share of our mental cultivation, and from whom we have derived so rich a legacy of models, in every department both of letters and of art. In the same brief manner I shall notice what the literature of Europe has derived from the oriental nations, whether in the more remote ages of antiquity, or during the flourishing period of Greece and Rome, or in consequence of the intimate connections which have subsisted between Europe and Asia in modern times. It is true that, were I to write in a manner strictly chronological, the ancient monuments of Asiatic and Egyptian genius would come to be considered before those of

the Greeks. But as it is my principal object to give a historical view of our European refinement, and to represent literature as influencing the affairs of active life, I apprehend I shall act more suitably to my design, if I postpone my account of those matters in which we have been indebted to the genius of the east, till I come to treat of that period in our history, when these first began to have a considerable share in the formation of the intellectual character of the Europeans. I shall then with particular attention review the antiquities of our northern ancestors, and the mythology of the Goths, together with the poetry and fiction of chivalry which are derived from these sources. The influence of the crusades, and the effects of the intercourse which at that period took place between the Franks and the Saracenic nations, will come next to be considered. In the remaining lectures, I shall describe the period which has elapsed since the revival of letters, and conclude with a full and particular review of the literature of the eighteenth century.

In the mean time should I be so fortunate, while I am occupied with the history of ancient literature, as to shew some things which are well known, and have been often treated by preceding writers, in a new light and a new connection,—I hope I shall have the greater chance of meeting with a patient

hearing, when, in the progress of my labours, I shall sometimes venture to try the productions of later ages, and more particularly those of our own times, by the test of principles which are, in my opinion, well entitled to respect and admiration, although they may not unfrequently appear to be totally in opposition to the acknowledged canons of ancient criticism.

IN addition to the reasons which I have already assigned for beginning my account of literature in general, with a description of that of the Greeks, I may notice that they are the only people who can be said to have, in almost every respect, created their own literature; and the excellence of whose attainments stands almost entirely unconnected with the previous cultivation of any other nations. This is what we can by no means assert either of the Roman literature, or of that of the modern nations of Europe. It is indeed true, according to their own testimony, that the Greeks derived their alphabet from the Phoenicians; and the first principles of architecture and mathematical sciences, as well as many detached ideas of their philosophers, and many of the useful arts of

life, from the Egyptians or the early inhabitants of Asia. Their oldest traditions and poems, moreover, have many points of resemblance to the most ancient remains of the Asiatic nations. But all this amounts to nothing more than a few scattered hints or mutilated recollections; and may indeed be all referred to the common origin of mankind, and the necessary influence of that district of the world, in which the mental improvement of our species was first considered as an object of general concern. Whatever the Greeks learned or borrowed from others, by the skill with which they improved, and the purposes to which they applied it, became thenceforth altogether their own. If they were indebted to those who had gone before them for solitary ideas, and unconnected hints, the great whole of their intellectual refinement was unquestionably the work of their own genius. The Romans, on the contrary, and the modern Europeans, set out with the possession of a complete body of literature, and examples of high cultivation derived from nations more ancient than themselves; the Romans receiving this rich legacy from the Greeks; and the modern Europeans being the common heirs of both of these peoples, as well as of much of the learning and refinement of the orientals,—possessions which, till within the two last centuries, they can scarcely be said either to have appropriated to

their own uses, or rendered more valuable by the additions of their own ingenuity.

There are three great incidents which divide the whole of the truly illustrious period of Greek history into as many different parts, and which also form three epochs in the history of the mental improvement of our species; the Persian war, in the first place, when the Greeks contended for the maintenance of their political freedom and independence, with united strength and success so glorious, against the overwhelming power of Asia;—the Peloponnesian war, in the second place, a civil war between Athens on the one hand, and the Doric states on the other, which raged throughout the whole of their country for the space of twenty-seven years; in the course of which the arms of kindred tribes were turned against each other, and the political power of Greece was destroyed by the valour of her own children;—and last of all, the expedition of Alexander, by means of which the spirit and the empire of Greece were extended over a great part of Asia, like the scattering of a mingled seed, destined to give birth in after ages to a rich harvest both of evil and of good. A new Græco-Asiatic taste and turn of thinking were produced at this period, which formed a bond of connection more close than had ever before united Europe and Asia; whose influence indeed has never ceased, and

which at this moment exerts no inconsiderable power over those who are scarcely aware of its existence.

Had the Greeks been unsuccessful in the war which they waged in defence of their liberty against the Persians, and had their country become at last a province of the great empire of Xerxes, their place in the history of the human mind must have been widely different from that which they at present hold. They must have remained stationary where the Persians found them ; or, it is probable, they might have declined from the eminence to which they had already attained. It is true that, to a certain degree, they must always have remained an intellectual, and even a refined people. Like other cultivated nations which fell under the power of Persia,—the Egyptians for instance, the Jews, or the Phœnicians,—they would have retained their language and their authors, and in part, it may be, their customs and their laws ; for the government of Persia was, upon the whole, singularly mild, and by far the noblest and the best of all the universal empires which the world has ever seen. But the spirit of man never reaches, without freedom, that high tone to which it attained during the glorious struggle of the Greeks.

The whole happy period of the political history of Greece, as well as all the glories of her litera-

ture, occupy no greater space than the three hundred years which intervened between Solon and Alexander.

With Solon commences a new epoch even in the literature of Greece. Not only does the perfecting of lyric and the beginning of dramatic poetry fall within this period ; it also gave birth to a crowd of didactic poets, who enlightened the opening curiosity of the public mind, and displayed, in all the beauty of verse, the fitness of moral laws, and the physical structure of the universe. It was then, too, that Herodotus carried at once to perfection the art of writing in prose. The freedom of spirit which Solon introduced and rendered durable, and the liberal education which the whole system of his laws rendered indispensably necessary to the noble and wealthy citizens of Athens, soon rendered the state which had been enlightened by his legislation, a central point of illumination to all the republics of Greece.

This happy period ended with Alexander the Great. Demosthenes was born only one year later than the too successful conqueror who waged the last war against the independence of his country, and he was the last great writer whose works were addressed to the Greeks as a nation. The Greeks continued indeed long afterwards to be a polished and a literary people. In Egypt, under the

Ptolemies, they became a more learned and a more philosophical people than they had ever been in the days of their ancient glory at home; but they were no longer a nation, and with their freedom their whole strength of feeling, and the peculiar tone of their spirit was for ever lost.

Within so short a space, then, lies all that vast and manifold creation of productions which, even to this hour, render Greece the object of universal wonder and reverence; a great spectacle, and well-deserving of thought; a period fruitful beyond measure, both of evil and of good, and thereby doubly instructive. The whole history of the world can shew but one more such spectacle of the real developement of awakened intellect; but that we shall have full leisure to consider in the sequel.

With Solon the proper epoch of Grecian literature begins. Before his time the Greeks possessed no more than commonly falls to the share of every people who are blessed with a favourable corporeal organization, while they are animated with the fresh impulse of a youthful society—traditions which hold the place of histories, and songs and poems which are repeated and remembered so as to serve instead of books. Such songs calculated to arouse national feelings, and to give animation in the hour of battle;—or to be sung at the festivals of their re-

ligion ;—or to perpetuate the joys of a successful; or the rage and hatred of a slighted lover ;—or the tears which the poet has consecrated to the memory of his departed mistress,—all these were possessed by the Greeks, in the utmost variety, from the most early period of their existence as a nation. Still more valuable are those songs of narrative, which express not the feelings that seize and overpower an individual poet, but embody the recollection and the feelings of the people,—the faint memory of an almost fabulous antiquity,—the achievements of heroes, and of gods,—the origin of a nation, and the creation of the world. But even these are to be found in abundance among other nations as well as among the Greeks. There is only one production, the high pre-eminence of which gives to the early ages of the Greeks a decided superiority over those of every other people,—the Homeric poems, the still astonishing works of the Iliad and the Odyssey. These indeed are the work of a preceding age; but it is sufficiently evident from the language, the contents, and above all from the spirit of these poems, that they were designed and composed within a short time (probably within a century) of the age of Solon. In his time, at all events, and partly by means of his personal exertions, they were first rescued from the precariousness and forgetfulness of oral recitation, arranged in the order

in which we see them, and rendered, as they have ever since continued to be, the objects of universal attention and regard.

Solon and his successors in the government of Athens, Pisistratus and the Pisistratidae, over and above the delight which they must have derived from the compositions themselves, were probably influenced by views of a nature purely political, to interest themselves in the preservation of the Homeric poems. About this period, that is six hundred years before Christ, the independence of the Greeks of Asia Minor was much threatened, not indeed as yet by the power of Persia, but by that of the Lydian monarchs, whose kingdom was soon after swallowed up in the immense empire of Cyrus. As soon, however, as that conqueror had overcome Croesus, and extended his power over the lesser Asia, no clear-sighted patriot could any longer conceal from himself the great danger which was impending over Greece. The greater part of the Grecian states, indeed, seem to have remained long in their security, without foreseeing the storm which was so near them, and which burst with such fury on their continent during the reigns of Darius and of Xerxes. But the danger must have been soon and thoroughly perceived by Athens, linked as she was in the closest intimacy with the Asiatic Greeks, not only by all the ties of a flourishing

commeree, but also by the common origin of their Ionic race. The revival of these old songs which relate how Grecian heroes warred with united strength against Asia, and laid siege to the metropolis of Priam, occurred, at least, at a very favourable period, to nourish in the Greeks the pride of heroic feelings, and excite them to like deeds in the cause of their independence.

Whether any such event as the Trojan war ever in reality took place, we have no positive means of deciding. The dynasty of Agamemnon and the Atreidae, however, falls almost within the limits of history. Neither is it at all unlikely that much intercourse subsisted at a very early period between the Greek peninsula and Asia Minor; for the inhabitants of the two countries were kindred peoples, speaking nearly the same language, and Pelops, from whom the peninsula itself derived its name, was a native of Asia. That the carrying away of a single princess should have been the cause of an universal and long protracted war, is, at least, abundantly consistent with the spirit of the heroic times, and forcibly recalls to our recollection a parallel period in the history of Christendom, and the chivalry of the middle ages. However much of fable and allegory may have been weaved into the story of Helen and Troy, that many great recollections of the remote ages were in some manner connected

with the local situation of Troy itself, is manifest from the graves of heroes,—the earthen tumuli which are still visible on that part of the coast: That these old Greek mounds or monuments, which were, according to universal tradition, pointed out as the graves of Achilles and Patroclus,—over one of which Alexander wept, envying the fate of the hero who had found a Homer to celebrate him,—that these were in existence in the time of the poet himself is, I think, apparent from many passages of the Iliad. It was reserved for the impious, or at least the foolish curiosity of our own age, to ransack these tombs, and violate the sacred repose of the ashes and arms of heroes, which were found still to exist within their recesses. But all these are matters of no importance to the subject of which I am at present treating; for although the Trojan war had been altogether the creation of the poet's fancy, that circumstance could have had little influence either on the object which Solon and Pisistratus had in view, or on the spirit of patriotism which was excited by the revival of the Homeric poems. The story was at all events universally believed, and listened to, as an incident of true and authentic history.

To the Greeks accordingly, of every age, these poems possessed a near and a national interest of the most lively and touching character, while to us their principal attraction consists in the more universal

charm of beautiful narration, and in the lofty representations which they unfold of the heroic life. For here there prevails not any peculiar mode of thinking, or system of prejudices, adapted to live only within a limited period, or exclusively to celebrate the fame and pre-eminence of some particular race ;—defects which are so apparent both in the old songs of the Arabians, and in the poems of Ossian. There breathes throughout these poems a freer spirit, a sensibility more open, more pure, and more universal—alive to every feeling which can make an impression on our nature, and extending to every circumstance and condition of the great family of man. A whole world is laid open to our view in the utmost beauty and clearness, a rich, a living, and an ever moving picture. The two heroic personages of Achilles and Ulysses, which occupy the first places in this new state of existence, embody the whole of a set of universal ideas and characters which are to be found in almost all the traditions of heroic ages, although nowhere else so happily unfolded or delineated with so masterly a hand. Achilles, a youthful hero, who, in the fulness of his victorious strength and beauty, exhausts all the glories of the fleeting life of man, but is doomed to an early death and a tragical destiny, is the first and the most lofty of these characters ; and a character of the same species is to be found in numberless poems of the heroic

age, but perhaps no where, if we except the writers of Greece, so well developed as in the sagas of our northern ancestors. Even among the most lively nations, the traditions and recollections of the heroic times are invested with a half mournful and melancholy feeling, a spirit of sorrow, sometimes elegiac, more frequently tragical—which speaks at once to our bosoms from the inmost soul of the poetry in which they are embodied: whether it be that the idea of a long vanished age of freedom, greatness, and heroism, stamps of necessity such an impression on those who are accustomed to live among the narrow and limited institutions of after times; or whether it be not rather that poets have chosen to express, only in compositions of a certain sort and in relation to certain periods, those feelings of distant reverence and self abasement with which it is natural to us at all times to reflect on the happiness and simplicity of ages that have long passed away. In Ulysses we have displayed another and a less elevated form of the heroic life, but one scarcely less fertile in subjects for poetry, or less interesting to the curiosity of posterity. This is the voyaging and wandering hero, whose experience and acuteness are equal to his valour, who is alike prepared to suffer with patience every hardship, and to plunge with boldness into every adventure; and who thus affords the most unlimited scope for the poetical

imagination, by giving the opportunity of introducing and adorning whatever of wonderful or of rare is supposed, during the infancy of geography, by the simple people of early societies, to belong to ages and places with which they are personally unacquainted. The Homeric works are equalled, or perhaps surpassed, in awful strength and depth of feeling by the poetry of the north—in audacity, in splendour, and in pomp, by that of the oriental nations. Their peculiar excellency lies in the intuitive perception of truth, the accuracy of description, and the great clearness of understanding, which are united in them, in a manner so unique, with all the simplicity of childhood, and all the richness of an unrivalled imagination. In them we find a mode of composition so full, that it often becomes prolix, and yet we are never weary of it, so matchless is the charm of the language, and so airy the lightness of the narrative; an almost dramatic developement of characters and passions, of speeches and replies; and an almost historical fidelity in the description of incidents the most minute. It is perhaps to this last peculiarity, which distinguishes Homer so much, even among the poets of his own country, that he is indebted for the name by which he is known to us. For *Homeros* signifies, in Greek, a witness or voucher, and this name has probably been given to him on account of his truth,—

such truth I mean as it was in the power of a poet—especially a poet who celebrates heroic ages, to possess. To us he is indeed a *Homer*—a faithful voucher, an unfalsifying witness of the true shape and fashion of the heroic life. The other explanation of the word *Homeros*—‘a blind man’—is pointed out in the often repeated and vulgar history which has come down to us of the life of a poet, concerning whom we know absolutely nothing, and is without doubt altogether to be despised. In the poetry of Milton, even without the express assertion of the poet himself, we can discover many marks that he saw only with the internal eye of the mind, but was deprived of the quickening and cheering influence of the light of day. The poetry of Ossian is clothed, in like manner, with a melancholy twilight, and seems to be wrapped, as it were, in an everlasting cloud. It is easy to perceive that the poet himself was in a similar condition. But he who can conceive that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the most clear and luminous of ancient poems, were composed by one deprived of his sight, must, at least in some degree, close his own eyes, before he can resist the evidence of so many thousand circumstances which testify, so incontrovertibly, the reverse.

In whatever way, and in whatever century, the Homeric poems might be created and fashioned,

they place before us a time when the heroic age was on the decline, or had perhaps already gone by. For there are two different worlds which both exist together in the compositions of Homer,—the world of marvels and tradition, which still however appears to be near and lively before the eyes of the poet; and the living circumstances and present concerns of the world which produced the poet himself. This commingling of the present and the past (by which the first is adorned and the second illustrated), lends in a pre-eminent degree to the Homeric poems, that charm which is so peculiarly their characteristic.

Of old the whole of Greece was ruled by kings who claimed descent from the heroic races. This is still the case in the world of Homer. Very soon, however, after his time, the regal form of government was entirely laid aside, and every people which had power enough to be independent, erected itself into a little republic. This change in the government of states, and the condition of their citizens, must have had a tendency to render the relations of society every day more and more prosaic. The old heroic tales must have by degrees become foreign to the feelings of the people, and there can be little doubt that this universal revolution of governments must have mainly contributed towards bringing Homer into that sort of oblivion,

out of which he was first recalled by the efforts of Solon and Pisistratus.

The Homeric poems are of so much importance in the literature both of Greece and of all Europe, and are in so great a degree the fountain heads from which all the refinement of the ancients was derived, that I could not resist the temptation of detaining you at least a few moments in considering their character. It is indeed at all times my wish to confine myself to inventors; and I shall not scruple to pass with the utmost rapidity over whole centuries of imitation. I pass over the whole period which intervened between Solon and the Persian war. This period was indeed chiefly occupied by weak imitations of Homer, or by attempts towards new exertions of intellect, and new species of writing, which reached not till long afterwards the full and perfect developement of maturity. Besides, the works of the greater part of the poets and other authors of this period have entirely perished, and they are known to us only by scattered fragments, and the criticisms of their successors.

The Persian war itself, which forms, in a political point of view, the most remarkable epoch in the history of Greece, is illustrious even when considered in regard to literature, and was distinguished by many great poets and authors whose writings

are still in our hands. Pindar, who was honoured by the Greeks as without exception the most sublime of all their poets, survived the conclusion of this war; during which his conduct gave rise to the suspicion that his dispositions were not patriotic but favourable to the interests of the invaders. Æschylus, the oldest of the great tragedians of Greece, was himself a soldier, and fought with heroism in many of those glorious battles—one of which he has celebrated by perhaps the most daring exertion of his dramatic genius. Herodotus, somewhat younger, was born only a few years before Xerxes undertook his prodigious enterprise against the Greeks; and when he read, before assembled Greece, the books of his history (which do much honour even to such a contest as they record), the great events which occupy his narrative were yet fresh in the proud recollection of his victorious countrymen.

The reproach which has been cast upon the character of Pindar is easily accounted for, by the aversion so frequently apparent in his writings, for that predominance of the democratic principle which gave cause, in his time, to so many violent commotions throughout Greece, and which occasioned in the end consequences yet more destructive;—as well as by the evident partiality which he shews for the regal form of government,

and that influence of the nobility which remained always so powerful among the Doric states. Monarchy and aristocracy, however, it is fair to observe, do not appear among any other people of antiquity in a light at once so mild and so illustrious as in the empire of Persia—a government which, in whatever way its power might be abused by particular princes, was on the whole founded on the basis of elevation of sentiment, and purity of manners.

As a *Doric* writer, Pindar is doubly valuable to us, for he is the sole representative of the many that are lost. What we call Greek literature, and possess under that name in the great writers who have come down to us, is in truth only the literature of Ionia and Athens,—and, if we take in the later times, of Alexandria. But at the same time when poetry, history, and philosophy, were flourishing in Athens and the Ionian states, the Doric people—(a race of Greeks so different from the Ionians in manners and government, in language and in modes of thinking)—possessed a literature distinct and peculiar to themselves—the existence of which is almost the only fact with respect to it of which we can be said to be assured;—poets of every kind,—a peculiar form of drama,—and, after the time of Pythagoras, philosophers also and other writers. Although all these have perished we have still Pindar; and from him we may extract at least some general

idea of Doric manners, and, if we make due allowances for the ornaments and partialities of the poet, of Doric life.

Nothing can be more foreign to the style of Pindar than the elaborate wildness of imagination, and the artificial obscurity which characterise the modern imitations of this great poet, and have from them received the name of Pindaric. If there be any obscurity in his own writings, it arises from the frequent allusions which he makes to things which are indeed foreign to us, but which were familiar and present to those for whom he wrote. While he is celebrating the victor in some games, it is not unnatural for him to introduce the praise of that heroic race from which he is descended—or of the city in which he was born—or of the deity in whose honour the games were held; and this gives occasion, without doubt, to some abruptness of transition. In truth these festival songs can scarcely be called lyric poems, at least they bear little resemblance to what we commonly understand by that name. They are heroic or epic poems composed in celebration of particular events, which were not merely sung, but accompanied with music and dancing, and brought forward in a manner somewhat dramatic. The peculiar characteristics of Pindar are—the lofty beauty and musical softness of his language—and his fondness of

considering every subject in the most dignified point of view of which it is susceptible. The graceful repose of high-born lords, who in peaceful times, and surrounded by happy dependents, passed a careless life in chivalric pastimes and contests; or listened, among the society of congenial friends, to the songs of illustrious poets, and the celebration of their heroic ancestors,—these are the subjects which Pindar has treated with unrivalled excellence,—and such is the mode of life which he ascribes, not to his beloved victors alone, and the Doric nobles, but to the gods themselves in Olympus, and to those whose virtues shall entitle them to participate in the glories of an eternal life.

The next great poet, *Æschylus*, was one of another kind, and animated with a spirit altogether different. The warlike, bold, and lofty sentiments of a soldier inflamed with the love of freedom, which are ever bursting forth in his poetry, place us at once within the circle of that feeling which might well be the predominant one of haughty Athens during the time of the great struggle which she so gloriously maintained. As a poet he appears only in that form which is the first in dignity, and the most peculiar to Greece—the great form of tragedy—which he himself first fashioned and unfolded, although perhaps he never carried it to the fulness of its perfection. His poetry is pre-eminent,

ly powerful, in the expression of the terrible and tragic passions. The depth of poetic feeling is in him accompanied with the intense earnestness of philosophic thought. A philosopher well may he be called; and the reproach which has been thrown against him—that he had revealed in his poems the mysteries, or the concealed doctrines of the secret society of Eleusis—is a proof how much truth in all things had been the object of his most earnest inquiries. In his spirit the whole mythology of the Greeks assumed a new, a peculiar, a characteristic appearance. He has not been contented with the representation of individual tragic events: Throughout all his works there prevails an universal and perpetual recurrence to a whole world of tragedy. The subjection of the old gods and Titans—and the history of that lofty race being subdued and enslaved by a meaner and less worthy generation—these are the great points to which almost all his narrations and all his catastrophes may be referred. The original dignity and greatness of nature and of man, and the daily declension of both into weakness and worthlessness, is another of his themes. Yet in the midst of the ruins and fragments of a perishing world, he delights to astonish us now and then with a view of that old gigantic strength—the spirit of which seems to be embodied in his Prometheus—ever

bold and ever free—chained and tortured, yet invincible within. It is impossible to deny to this representation the merit of a moral sublimity, which is more glorious than any merely poetical beauty of which tragedy can be the vehicle.

Herodotus, from whom we have our account of the Persian war, has been called the father of history. It is true that his work pretends to be nothing more than a chronicle—a candid and open narration of all the incidents which occurred in the neighbourhood, and made the greatest impression on the mind of the narrator—with which he has, moreover, interwoven whatever he knew from any other source, either of the world or of its history—and into which he has introduced, by way of episode, a description of his travels, including all the observations which he had made on the manners and customs of foreign countries, little known to the Greeks in general, but carefully visited and studied by himself. The number of his episodes, and the free and poetical arrangement which he has followed, have induced many critics to rank his work among the *epic* narrations of heroic actions. But in reality, the truth, the simplicity, the clearness, the flexibility, and the unsought pathos which characterise Herodotus, are exactly the qualities which render an historical work perfect in its kind, and which, but for their rarity,—we

should all be ready to consider as the most indispensably necessary in that species of composition. He is the Homer of history.

To these three great authors whom I have attempted to describe, succeeded, although at some little distance of time, others of a rank equally exalted. The first is Sophocles. In every species of intellectual developement—(as in the visible gradations of the physical world)—there is one short period of complete bloom—one highest point of fulness and perfection—which is manifested, at the moment of its existence, by the beauty and the faultlessness of the form and the language in which it is embodied. This point, not in the art of composing tragedies alone, but in the whole poetry and mental refinement of the Greeks, is the period of Sophocles. In him we find an overflowing fulness of that indescribable charm of which we can perceive only rare specimens in the writings of most other poets and writers—but which whenever we do find it, we at once, by intuition as it were, recognise to be the symbol of perfection, whether it makes its appearance in the structure of thought or the style of language. Through the transparent beauty of his works we can perceive the internal harmony and beauty of his soul. It is worthy of remark, that in most of the old poets many traces are to be found of a peculiar know-

ledge, and just conceptions, of the nature and attributes of the Deity. Or if it be impossible that they had really these conceptions—(which seems to follow of necessity from what we know respecting the ages in which they lived)—it were at least the height of injustice to deny, that the greatest and the best of them have anticipated, to a wonderful degree, those deep feelings of awe and reverence with which we, born in happier days, contemplate the revealed character of God. In none of the most ancient poets does this appear with more clearness and brilliancy than in Sophocles. In all countries it has been the fate and progress of poetry to begin with the wonderful and the sublime, with the mysterious majesty of the gods, and the elevated character of the heroic times,—and ever afterwards to descend lower and lower from this lofty flight—to approach nearer and nearer to the earth—till at last it sinks—never to rise again—into the common life and citizenship of ordinary men. The region most favourable for poetry is that which lies in the middle, between these two extremes, while the magnanimity of the heroic time still appears natural and unsought, and while our conceptions of Deity, although still fresh and animated, do not stalk before us in the gigantic forms of supernatural strength and terror, but have assumed the milder and more touching character of

human tenderness, serenity, and repose. This is the peculiar region and delight of Sophocles. With regard to the artificial structure of Greek tragedy which was by him brought to its perfection, I shall have many opportunities of considering that subject in the sequel—and then more particularly, when I shall have to call your attention to the successful or abortive attempts of other nations to imitate, or naturalise among themselves, this great form of the art of poetry among the Greeks.

Euripides was the successor of Sophocles in his art, but not in his sentiments, which are, indeed, those of an altogether different generation. He was at least as much an orator as a poet, and accordingly as men judge favourably or unfavourably of him, is commonly styled either a philosopher, or a sophist. But in the school of sophistry he certainly was formed, and from it he has unquestionably borrowed many ornaments of a nature altogether foreign from that of poetry; a circumstance which is often dwelt upon with peculiar felicity by his unmerciful enemy and persecutor Aristophanes. But before I proceed to describe in a few words this writer and some others of the declining age of Greece, it is necessary that I should first explain, in a brief and general manner, by what steps, about the commencement of the civil wars and political corruptions of the country, the race of sophists succeeded in acquiring

that wide, destructive, and subduing influence over the intellectual character of Greece, which they maintained without opposition till Socrates rose up against them ; who having brought back the perverted taste of the Athenians as far as it was possible, from the errors of these pernicious teachers, became the founder of that nobler school out of which Plato proceeded.

LECTURE II.

THE LATER LITERATURE OF THE GREEKS—THEIR SOPHISTS AND PHILOSOPHERS—THE ALEXANDRIAN AGE.

IN my first lecture I endeavoured, by a rapid sketch, to recall to your recollection the brilliant spectacle of Greek genius, as it flourished for a few years in all its power and pre-eminence. I must now set before you the darker side of the picture, and proceed to contemplate the effects of that principle of decay, whose operation is destined to follow so closely and so certainly, after every period distinguished by the greatness of its inventions, and the beauties of its productions;—and which here also, when manners had become impure, and governments corrupted, by means of a false and deceitful sophistry, succeeded in accomplishing the utter ruin of art and genius among the Greeks.

The first great writer who sets before us a view of this decline and corruption of Greece, as manifested in the incidents of her political history, is Thucy-

dides. By the loftiness of his style, and the depth of his reflections, this author has secured to himself a place among the very first writers of Greece. His history is the masterpiece of energetic representation ;—such was the judgment of all antiquity concerning it, and on that account it was commonly said to be, not indeed a poetical, but a historical drama. And truly, well might the history of that great civil war which occasioned the decline, and ended in the ruin of his once flourishing, happy, and powerful country, appear to the historian himself as possessing all the life and interest of a fearful tragedy. The events which he has recorded are indeed invested, to our eyes, with an interest yet more mighty ; for to them we can now trace consequences which in his time could not have been apparent—in them we perceive the causes of the decay and downfall, not of Athens only but of universal Greece. Thucydides both framed and perfected that form of historical writing which is peculiar to the Greeks. The characteristics of his method of composing history consist, first, in the interweaving of political speeches, framed in a manner at once clear and elaborate, which introduce us into the secret motives and counsels by which the political events of the period were governed, enable us to survey every particular incident exactly from that point of view in which

it was regarded by each of the most opposite parties,—and lay open the most hidden wiles of contending statesmen; with an acumen superior to what was ever exerted by the craftiest of them all; secondly, in an almost poetical, minute, energetic, and lively representation of battles, and those other external incidents which occupy but too great a space in the history of human affairs; and lastly, in the accumulation of all those highest excellencies of style, which can be embodied in the richest, most ornamented, and most energetic prose.

The similarity of their political institutions, and the equal weight and influence which was, under their form of government, attached to popular oratory, enabled the Romans to naturalise among themselves this particular species of writing, with greater ease, and a success more perfect than any other department of the literature of the Greeks. With us modern Europeans the case is widely different; our attempts towards imitation of the Greek historians have been in general lamentably unsuccessful. The relations of society among us are totally of another sort from what they were in the republics of antiquity, and oratory exerts no longer over mankind that imperative and often destructive influence which it formerly possessed. Above all, such is the effect of that immense storehouse of facts which we have it in our power to review in

the collected history of the world, that we have lost all taste for minute and poetical descriptions of battles, sieges, and other external incidents; we desire instead of these, short and precise sketches which carry us without any circumlocution to the point in view, and explain in simple narrative events as they really happened, with the true causes which brought them about. Herodotus, distinguished as he is by unadorned simplicity and beautiful clearness, possesses a much greater share of this expressive brevity, and coincides much more nearly with our ideas of excellence—or at least with the scope of our own attempts in historical composition, than Thucydides. He accordingly is the model of modern historians, and indeed, he was the model of Thucydides himself, who, however in some respects he may fall short of perfection, holds unquestionably the first place among the historians of Greece. His want of perfection lies neither in the arrangement of his history as a whole, nor in the connection of its parts, for these are throughout dignified and exquisite, or as was expressed in the universal encomium of antiquity, well worthy of a great historical tragedy; but merely in his style, which is somewhat massive and hard, and not unfrequently obscure. Whether it be that the last touch of the master's hand was denied, not to the latter part alone and the conclusion, but (as it has

been conjectured by a critic of great discernment), to the general review and polishing of the whole work; or whether it be, that it was impossible for one who composed before the expiration of the age in which the art of writing in prose was first created and fashioned—(more particularly for one who made use of a style so ambitious as that which was attempted by this prince of historians), to reach at once the masterly eminence to which he has attained, without leaving behind him some traces of the laborious straining and toil which must have preceded the accomplishment of his daring undertaking;—or whether it might not be that Thucydides found a style, such as he has employed, sublime and masterly, yet rough and in some measure repulsive, the most suitable vehicle for the dark contents of his tragic story,—the fearful catastrophes, the decay and the ruin of his country;—in so much that he disdained to record and lament them, in the language of elegance, but considered himself throughout the progress of his work—(what he has powerfully declared himself in its commencement)—as one framing a history destined to be a *possession unto eternity.**

While Thucydides has thus set before our eyes, and explained, in a general manner, the causes and progress of internal corruption in all the states and

* *Kritikos is omis.*

societies of Greece; Aristophanes, on the other hand, has painted the deep decline of *manners* not only in Athens but throughout all the republics of Greece, in a manner and with a power of which those who are unacquainted with him can form no conception, but the place of which could not have been supplied to us by any other poetical work, or by any monument whatever of antiquity. In this point of view, when considered as a document of the history of ancient manners, the value of his works is now universally recognised.

If we would judge of Aristophanes as a writer and as a poet—we must transplant ourselves freely and entirely into the age in which he lived. In the modern ages of Europe it has often been made the subject of reproach against particular nations or periods, that literature in general, but principally the poets and their works, have too exclusively endeavoured to regulate themselves according to the rules of polished society, and, above all, the prejudices of the female sex. Even among those nations and in those periods which have been most frequently charged with this fault, there has been no want of authors, who have loudly lamented that it should be so, and asserted and maintained with no inconsiderable zeal, that the introduction of this far-sought elegance and gallantry, not only into the body of literature as a whole, but even into those

departments of it where their presence is most unsuitable, has an evident tendency to make literature tame, poor, uniform, and unmanly. It may be, that there is some foundation for this complaint: the whole literature of antiquity, but particularly that of the Greeks, lies open to a reproach of an entirely opposite nature. If our literature has sometimes been too exclusively feminine, theirs was at all times uniformly and exclusively masculine, not unfrequently of a nature far more rough and unpolished than might have been expected from the general intellectual character and refinement of the ancients.

In the most ancient times indeed (as, even at this day, we can judge from the picture of manners which is unfolded to us in the Homeric poems), the situation of women in Greece possessed a considerable share of freedom and respectability; if we compare it with that of the same sex in other countries, at a period equally early in the formation of society, we may even say that it was happy. But in later times the Greeks adopted by degrees all the tyrannical prejudices of their Asiatic neighbours, and, like them, devoted the whole female sex to total seclusion, confinement, and degradation. The republican form of government was, of itself, inimical in the highest degree to the influence and importance of the women; for its evident tendency

was to fill the whole life and soul of the men with matters of public moment—with views which whether they were just or false, and events which whether they were real or fictitious, were all of a nature purely patriotic—and, above all, to engross the whole attention of each individual, with the peculiar political tenets or prejudices of the sect or party to which he belonged. It is true that the situation of the women was not every where the same; on the contrary it was extremely different in different states; and the several tribes which were included under the common name of Greeks, disagreed in this matter as much as they did in almost every other point either of manners or of politics. In Sparta, and in general among all the descendants of the Doric race, more particularly among those of them who had adopted the ethical principles of the Pythagoreans, the natural rights and dignity of the female character were recognised infinitely more than in the Ionian republics. Upon the whole, however, it were in vain to deny that the Asiatic system of secluding and confining the women had obtained a very extensive influence throughout Greece,—a circumstance which can indeed be easily traced in certain unhappy effects which it produced on the works of Grecian genius. In these works, however masterly in other respects may be their excellence, there is

often wanting a certain delicate bloom of womanly tenderness and refinement, which is very far from being fit for introduction every where,—than which nothing can be more utterly detestable when it bears the slightest mark of being far sought or laboured—but which we miss with no inconsiderable regret in those situations where it might have been appropriately admitted—to say nothing of the disgust which we feel when its place is occupied by vulgarity or coarseness, whether real or affected. Through this vice in their mode of life, the writings of the ancients in general, but most of all, those of the Greeks, have not only been rendered less polished than might have been expected from people so distinguished as they were for refinement and urbanity; the contempt and depression of the female sex have wrought their own revenge by effects yet more positively injurious, and stained the whole body of their literature with a rudeness that is always unmannerly, and not unfrequently unnatural. Even in the most beautiful and noble of the works of the ancients, our attention is every now and then irresistibly recalled by some circumstance or other to this point, in which their morality was so defective, and their manners so perverted from the standard of their original simplicity.

Here, where we are treating of the decline of Gre-

cian manners, and of the writer who has painted that decline the most powerfully and the most clearly—the consideration of this common defect of antiquity has I imagine been not improperly introduced. But when this imperfection has once been distinctly recognised as one, the reproach of which affects in justice not the individual writers, but rather the collective character, manners, and literature of antiquity ; it were absurd to allow ourselves to be any longer so much influenced by it, as to disguise from ourselves the great qualities often found in combination with it in writings which are altogether invaluable to us, both as specimens of poetical art, and as representations of the spoken wit of a very highly refined state of society—to refuse, in one word, to perceive in Aristophanes the great poet which he really is. It is true that the species and form of his writing—if indeed that can be said with propriety to belong to any precise species or form of composition—are things to which we have no parallel in modern letters. All the peculiarities of the old comedy may be traced to those deifications of physical powers, which were prevalent among the ancients. Among them, in the festivals dedicated to Bacchus and the other frolicksome deities, every sort of freedom—even the wildest ebullitions of mirth and jollity, were not only things permitted—they were strictly in character,

and formed, in truth, the consecrated ceremonial of the season. The fancy, above all things, a power by its very nature impatient of constraint, the birthright and peculiar possession of the poet, was on these occasions permitted to attempt the most audacious heights, and revel in the wildest world of dreams,—loosened for a moment from all those fetters of law, custom, and propriety, which at other times, and in other species of writing, must ever regulate its exertion even in the hands of poets. The true poet, however, at whatever time this old privilege granted him a Saturnalian licence for the play of his fancy, was uniformly impressed with a sense of the obligation under which he lay, not only by a rich and various display of his inventive genius, but by the highest elegance of language and versification, to maintain entire his poetical dignity and descent, and to shew in the midst of all his extravagances, that he was not animated by prosaic petulance, nor personal spleen, but inspired with the genuine audacity and fearlessness of a poet. Of this there is the most perfect illustration in Aristophanes. In language and versification his excellence is not barely acknowledged—it is such as to entitle him to take his place among the first poets to whom Greece has given birth. In many passages of serious and earnest poetry which (thanks to the boundless variety and lawless forma-

tion of the popular comedy of Athens), he has here and there introduced, Aristophanes shews himself to be a true poet, and capable, had he so chosen, of reaching the highest eminence even in the more dignified departments of his art. However much his writings are disfigured by a perpetual admixture of obscenity and filth, and however great a part of his wit must to us in modern times be altogether unintelligible,—after deducting from the computation every thing that is either offensive or obscure, there will still remain to the readers of Aristophanes a luxurious intellectual banquet of wit, fancy, invention, and poetical boldness. Liberty, such as that of which he makes use, could indeed have existed nowhere but under such a lawless democracy as that which ruled Athens during the life of Aristophanes. But that a species of drama originally intended solely for popular amusement in one particular city, should have admitted or hazarded so rich a display of poetry—this is a circumstance which cannot fail to give us the highest possible idea, if not of the general respectability, at least of the liveliness, spirituality, and correct taste of the populace, in that remarkable state which formed the focus and central point of all the eloquence and refinement, as well as of all the lawlessness and all the corruption, of the Greeks.

This might be abundantly sufficient, not indeed

to represent Aristophanes as a fit subject of imitation—for that he can never be—but to set his merit as a poet in its true light. But if we examine into the use which he has made as a man—but more particularly as a citizen—of that liberty which was his poetical birthright, both by the manners of antiquity, and by the constitution of his country, we shall find many things which might be said still farther in his vindication, and which cannot indeed fail to raise him personally in our esteem. His principal merit as a patriot consists in the fidelity with which he paints all the corruptions of the state, and in the chastisement which he inflicts on the pestilent demagogues who caused that corruption or profited by its effects. The latter duty was attended with no inconsiderable danger in a state governed by a democracy, and during a time of total anarchy—yet Aristophanes has performed it with the most fearless resolution. It is true that he pursues and parodies Euripides with unrelenting severity; but this is perfectly in character with that old spirit of merciless enmity which animated all the comic poets against the tragedians; and it is impossible not to perceive that not only the more ancient Aeschylus, but even his cotemporary Sophocles, is uniformly mentioned in a tone altogether different, in a temper moderate and sparing—nay, very frequently with the profoundest feelings of admiration.

and respect. It forms another grievous subject of reproach against Aristophanes, that he has represented in colours so odious, Socrates, the most wise and the most virtuous of all his fellow citizens ; it is however by no means improbable that this was not the effect of mere poetical wantonness ; but that Aristophanes selected, without any bad intention, that first and best of illustrious names, that he might under it render the Sophists as ridiculous as they deserved to be, and as foolish and worthless in the eyes of the people as he could make them. The poet, it is not unlikely, in his own mind, mingled and confounded, even without wishing it, this inestimable sage with his enemies the Sophists, to whose school he had at first indeed been conducted by his inclination, but whose maxims he studied, and whose schools he frequented in his maturer years, solely with the view of making himself master of that which he intended to refute and overthrow ; the utter vanity of whose doctrines induced him to begin the arduous attempt to revolutionise the whole intellectual character of his countrymen, and reinstate truth in her rightful supremacy.

Not only political institutions and private manners—but the art of eloquence itself, and all those branches of knowledge which exert themselves and are communicated by speech—and, in short, the whole system of thinking, among the Greeks, were

poisoned, and corrupted, and degraded by the spirit of SOPHISTRY, till Socrates turned back the stream of destruction, and guarded his country as well as might be against the danger of its future devastations. This indefatigable enquirer and friend of truth, was a simple citizen of Athens, spent his days in the most narrow and limited situation of life, and had no immediate influence except on a small circle of chosen disciples and congenial friends, and yet his was a life of greater importance to Greece, and his name forms perhaps a more remarkable epoch in her history, than that of either the lawgiver Solon, or the conqueror Alexander.—But before I can set in an intelligible manner before your eyes this memorable struggle of Socrates, the regeneration of philosophy which resulted from it, and the subsequent entire renovation and exaltation of the intellectual character of Greece—it is necessary that I should first look backwards for a moment to the more ancient philosophy and popular belief of the Greeks, as well as to the commencement of that spirit of sophistry which sprung up between that philosophy and that belief, and was reconcileable with neither.

However conspicuous was the pre-eminence of the Greeks in every thing which relates to art and general cultivation, in every thing which belongs to the external appearance and sensible surface of hu-

man refinement; it is impossible to deny that those principles which formed the ground-work of all these brilliant and beautiful manifestations,—the ideas of the Greeks concerning the nature of the universe, concerning God and man—were far too material, and, in effect, if not despicable, at least unsatisfactory. The more ancient of the Greek philosophers themselves were indeed all of this opinion, for we find them perpetually laying hold of Homer and Hesiod, as the most known and celebrated masters of the Greek mythology, not to approve of or praise them, but to ridicule in the mass their poetical theology, and to reprehend and condemn them, in the severest terms, for the unworthy, irrational, and immoral representations of the Deity which are contained in their works, and had, through their means, become constituent parts of the popular faith. To us indeed these poetical representations wear no appearance but that of a beautiful play of imagination, and as such, they are well fitted to furnish us both with delight and inspiration; but if we reflect a little deeper on the matter, if we consider that these pleasing vagaries of fancy were really received into the popular creed as so many sober truths, and contemplate the necessary consequences of this, the use to which the herd of vulgar and unquestioning believers must have applied them, in spite of all our

partiality for the bewitching poetry in which these absurdities are embodied, we shall have, I imagine, no great difficulty in adopting; at least to a certain extent, the unfavourable and condemnatory judgment of the philosophers; we shall at least feel and understand the grounds of their aversion. It is indeed very probable that they carried their enmity to poetry, which had been rationally enough commenced, much too far, and that they expressed themselves much too generally in their vituperation of poetical practice: for in truth the development of Greek genius was so diversified, that nothing was more difficult than to pronounce a judgment at once just and general concerning any part of their literature,—more particularly in the early period of its history. However this might be, it is extremely probable that the poems previous to the time of Homer, those songs which celebrated the labours of Hercules—the war of gods, giants, and heroes,—the beleaguering of Thebes by the seven champions,—but above all the marvellous expedition of Jason and the Argonauts—might have, in part at least, contained views more profound, and been founded on principles much more elevated, than the later heroic poems of the Trojan time. Some things in these more ancient poems might coincide much more closely with the remains of Asiatic theology, than any production of the.

Greeks, after their mode of thinking had been changed—they might even amount to positive recollections of an Asiatic ancestry. Such at least, to give a single example, appears plainly to be the case with that beautiful piece of poetry which goes under the name of Hesiod, wherein the existence of an original and golden age of innocence, during which undisturbed felicity was the lot of men living in friendship with the gods—and themselves godlike in their lives; next, that evil age in which strength and valour become the tests of justice,—and then the whole train of subsequent degradation and corruption among mankind—are all distinctly and orthodoxly set forth. In relation to these probably more profound and dignified conceptions of the most ancient poets of Greece, *Orpheus* is a name, although possibly fabulous, by no means destitute of meaning to the student of history; for it represents at least the name of some real poet who revealed and communicated to his fellow countrymen, in such heroic songs as were best adapted for the spirit of his age, the holy symbols and mysterious secrets of these ancient recollections.

Whatever may have been the case in more remote periods, and of whatever nature the poetry of *Orpheus* may have been, these more dignified conceptions, of which I have been speaking, are altogether lost, or appear only in a few very faint

traces, in the works of the Homeric age. In the Theogony which has been left us by Hesiod, a work whose authority was apparently very universally admitted, and which may be taken as a standard by which to judge of many similar works that have perished,—these conceptions are indeed sufficiently manifest; but they are set forth in a manner too material and altogether contemptible. According to this poem the world is a mere appendix to chaos. To say nothing of the inadequate and senseless descriptions of the gods, nature is represented only in her character of fertility and fulness of life, and that under an immense variety of emblems, which commonly however terminate in the idea of some enormous animal. The life of the physical world, again, is, according to the doctrines of this poetical theology, represented merely as a perpetual circumrotation of love and hatred, attraction and repulsion; but we can scarcely perceive the least surmise even of the existence of that higher spirit, which has indeed its proper residence in the intellect of man, but which, even in external nature—at least in certain parts of her structure,—breaks through and is made manifest.

In this theology there is contained in fact absolute materialism—not indeed set forth systematically with all the pretension of science and philosophy—but clothed in poetical form, and adapted

to take fast and exclusive hold of the popular belief. Of Homer indeed we cannot with propriety say so much ; at least no such thorough materialism appears on the face of his writings. There is much more of it however than could have been wished in those altogether human representations, which his poetical fancy has given us of the character and conduct of deities ; for in them we can perceive no trace either of what we, in philosophical as well as in common language, call religion, or of any other principle which might be substituted in its place. Not that there is any unbelief, or scepticism, or any openly and contemptibly material conception of the divine nature, in the writings of Homer. His defect is rather a total ignorance, or an incapability, like that of a child, for forming any adequate idea of God—diversified, however, here and there, as is the case in children, with an exquisite feeling, or a happy surmise, or a solitary flash of the truth.

According to the view which I have now been taking of the matter, Hesiod must be entirely given up to the strong and well-founded reproaches of the ancient philosophers, but the judgment which we should form of Homer ought to be somewhat more favourable. Yet there is no difficulty in seeing what parts even of his mythology must have given offence to the moralists of after times,

and it is not to be denied that, upon the whole, in a poetical, but much more in a moral point of view, his representations of the gods form the weakest parts. of all his productions. If the Homeric heroes, in their size and strength at least, appear superhuman and godlike, it is equally true that the Homeric gods are of a nature infinitely coarser, and much more entangled with human infirmities, and in all respects less godlike beings, than the heroes in whose quarrels they engage. This may easily be accounted for, if we reflect that, in framing the character and actions of his deities, the poet did not, in all probability, consider himself as entitled to exert the ennobling power of his own imagination, but adhered as closely as he could to the relics of ancient tradition, and the substance of the popular belief,

All the forms attributed to deities, and all the incidents which compose their history in the popular creed of antiquity, had originally some covert meaning—most frequently of a physical nature. Now it might easily have been foreseen that an attempt to represent in this manner physical objects and events under the guise of human beings, and human actions, could not fail to terminate, very often at once in absurdity and in immorality. Let us only consider the fable of Saturn or Chronos, who is represented as eating his own children. Nothing can be more odious than this, if

we take it in its human or moral acceptation ; and yet nothing more is intended by it than to set forth the perpetual decay and renewal of external things, the destroying and reproductive powers of nature herself. Hesiod abounds in similar fictions and representations, which become altogether senseless, improper, and vicious, the moment we view them without reference to their original and physical meaning. In like manner, that symbolic meaning, which was originally intended to be shadowed forth in all the corporeal representations of divine or superhuman nature, is extremely hostile to beauty in all the imitative arts. Let us take for instance the representation of a hundred-handed giant, a plain and obvious emblem of strength and enormous activity. In a poem we might find no great fault with this, and indeed we are familiar with its occurrence both in Homer and Hesiod ; but our tolerance is only produced by the dulness of our imaginations, and the difficulty with which we form to ourselves any precise and lively idea of a thing described to us only in words. Were the hundred-handed giant set distinctly and substantially before us in a work of sculpture, we should be as much shocked with the deformity of this Grecian image, as we can be with any of the hideous and unearthly monsters, which fill the gloomy temples of Jaggernaut or Benares. . Or

we may take any representations of a similar nature, however superior to the one I have instanced, both in spirituality and in dignity; we shall find the best of them almost equally inimical to the beauty of form. The Indians, for example, embody their conception of the three great exertions of the power of one Divine Being,—creation, preservation, and destruction—in the image of a figure with three heads. In like manner, and with a similar typical meaning and purpose, the Brahma of Hindostan is represented with four faces, exactly as the Janus of ancient Italy was represented with two. All these symbolical images are hostile to the beauty of imitative representations. The art of sculpture reached accordingly far greater perfection among the Greeks than it ever attained among the Egyptians, merely because the former people did not adhere so pertinaciously as the latter to these ancient symbols, but were perpetually laying them more and more aside, in so far as they were chargeable with deformity; although they at no time framed their images of superior beings after mere human models, but were ever solicitous to stamp, upon the features which they borrowed from them, the seal and impress of divinity. In their poetry also the same thing may be remarked; for it was uniformly attempted by all their serious poets, but most of all

by the grand and noble lyrical poet on whose genius I have already commented, to soften down and polish away those rough and barbarous circumstances in their ancient mythology, which are most offensive to a refined understanding. It is true that these circumstances were never so thoroughly disguised in their poetry as in their sculpture, for the poetry of the Greeks was religious in its origin, and depended for its existence on that very mythology, of whose deformities, however glaring, it would have been hazardous, and in all probability quite useless, for any one poet to attempt the eradication. For this reason, even in those poets who are the fondest of representing deities as mere men, there are always some traces to be discovered of these ancient types. A single example from Homer (whose deities are the most human of all), will render this abundantly perspicuous. When Jupiter, in an ebullition of rage by no means inconsistent with his Homeric character, tells the assembled gods, that although they should fasten a chain to the heavens, and drag it downwards with united strength, they would not be able to move him from his seat—nay that, if it so pleased him, he could by one touch draw them all up to him from the earth: at first sight this appears to be nothing more than a piece of rough and swaggering rodomontado, yet there is no doubt that in this

passage reference is made to the chain-like connection which runs through all things, and unites, in some sort, not only the heavens with the earth, and the earth with the sea—but the greatest and the most dignified, with the weakest and the humblest of intellectual existences. So accordingly was this allegory universally explained among the ancients. A second passage sets the matter in a yet clearer light, and is even more disagreeable to our feelings, when considered only in its obvious and primary acceptation. In another of these customary fits of passion, the father of gods and men desires Juno to reflect on the strife which she of old had kindled, by persevering in her unmerciful persecution of Hercules, his favourite son;—and how, in consequence of that strife, the queen of heaven (which antiquity interpreted to mean the sky), had been suspended by her fastened hands, from the vault of the firmament, having each foot burdened with the weight of an anvil. It is probable that the poet, in this instance, did not shadow forth some mere allegorical conception of his own, but alluded to some individual and familiar hieroglyphical carving in one of the temples of his country. Passages of this nature however are of very rare occurrence in Homer, and on this account many commentators either reject them as not genuine, or endeavour to furnish them with some different interpretation,

It was probably owing to these and other similar representations, that the great moralists of Greece entertained an unfavourable opinion, not of Homer only, but of poetry itself, and in their ideal systems of perfect legislation and government, entirely prohibited the use of that impassionating art. But the poetical application of these relics of a former time,—of this imperfect, and, in a great measure, unintelligible system of symbols, must have been equally offensive to the moral writers, for another reason of an altogether different kind. In consequence of that universal vanity and ambition of the ancients, which attributed the origin of all their noble and illustrious families to some hero, and the birth of every hero to some god,—the numberless procession of these demigod-children ascribed to all the deities, but particularly to Jupiter—was such, that Ovid has entirely filled several books of his great poem with an account of the divine amours which gave occasion to their birth. All this, as I have already observed, is regarded by us as the mere display of a luxurious and delightful imagination, and we can scarcely conceive the possibility of any serious and pious belief having ever been attached to absurdities so amusing. But how could the ancient moralists consider so lightly poetical fictions which formed the root and essence of the popular creed of their country?—a creed too on which the

whole internal principles, and exterior demonstrations of moral feeling were substantially dependent; —whose pernicious influence on the character of those who adopted it, was every day before their eyes, in the willing zeal with which their believing countrymen imitated the moral transgressions of their gods. .

In so far then the reproaches of the old philosophers, if we set them in a proper point of view, may be both understood and justified. But, in truth, before we can judge aright of this matter, we must draw a line of distinction between Homer individually considered, and the ancient mythology taken as a general system of belief.—Homer, in spite of all his defects (and we have already touched upon most of them), has been the source of so much good both to Greece and to all Europe, that we cannot sufficiently express the gratitude we owe to Solon and the Pisistratidæ for preserving to us this great poet, whom the philosophers, had their opinions ever gained the mastery, would in all probability have brought into forgetfulness, as they have already done every thing that lay in their power to bring him into contempt. But if we consider the Greek mythology in general, and out of connection with this prince of all ancient poets,—we shall not be able to close our eyes to the fact, that it was not only defective in the particular

moral ideas which it unfolded, but was on the whole, and in the innermost principles on which it was founded—material, inadequate, and unworthy of the divine nature. It should not however be forgot that these very philosophers, who indulged themselves so freely in railing against the poets and their mythology, had themselves, previous to the time of Socrates, scarcely ever made any inquiries into the proper nature of the Deity, and indeed very seldom advanced farther than certain vague and indefinite feelings of veneration for the elemental powers of the physical world;—moreover, from being philosophers, they were very soon converted into sophists, and were, in that character, infinitely more dangerous, both in a political and in a moral point of view, than any of the old poets ever were, with all their ignorance and simplicity.

Not only the poetry, but the philosophy of the ancients, had its origin among the Asiatic Greeks. The same climate which produced Homer and Herodotus, gave birth also to the first and greatest of the philosophers,—not only to Thales and Heraclitus, who founded in their own time the Ionian school, properly so named; but also to those who extended the influence of its doctrines in Magna Graecia, and among the southern Italians—as, for example, the poet Xenophanes, and the institutor of the great learned confederacy, Pythagoras. We are

all accustomed to talk with wonder and reverence of the art and the poetry of the Greeks; yet perhaps their genius appears no where so active, so inventive, and so rich as in their philosophy. Even their errors are instructive, for they were always the fruit of reflection. They had no beaten path of truth prepared for them, but were obliged to seek out and beat a pathway for themselves; and accordingly they are best able to teach us how far men can, by the unassisted power of their own nature, advance in the inquiry after truth. But this philosophy is well deserving of a little farther consideration.

It was the custom of the Ionian philosophers to reverence one or other of the elements as the first and primary principle of nature—some water, as Thales,—others fire, as Heraclitus. It is scarcely to be believed that they meant all this in a mere corporeal acceptation. They recognised, it is probable, under the name of the liquid element, not only the nourishing and connecting power of water, but also the general principle of perpetual change and variety in nature. And in like manner, when Heraclitus said that fire was the origin of all things, he did not surely refer merely to external and visible fire, but meant rather to express that hidden heat, that internal fire, which was universally considered by the ancients as the peculiar and vivify-

ing power in every thing that lives. Heraclitus, the founder of this doctrine, seems to have had conceptions of a nature more profound, and spiritual, than any of his brethren. But perhaps the incapacity of all these philosophers to set themselves free from the fetters of materialism, may be best illustrated by the example of Anaxagoras. This philosopher is well worthy of mention, for he was the first before Socrates who recognised the existence of a supreme intelligence, directing and governing the whole system and concerns of nature and the universe; and yet he attempted to illuminate the world by recurrence to those minute and impereable elemental atoms—of which, according to the doctrine of materialism, the whole universe is composed. This atomical philosophy, which accounts for the creation of the world on the principle of mechanical attraction, was very early reduced to the shape of a regular system by Leucippus and Democritus; but afterwards it became, by means of Epicurus, as prevalent among both Greeks and Romans as it ever was among the moderns of the eighteenth century.—This is that proper materialism which strikes at once at the root of the idea of a God.

It is in vain to suppose that these were mere speculations, and destitute of any influence on active life. The utter defectiveness of the popular faith of the Greeks, and of their philosophy, previous to the

time of Socrates, will be most evident, if we direct our attention to the opinions which they embraced with regard to the immortality of the soul. That indistinct and gloomy world of shades, which was celebrated by the poets, and believed in by the common people, was at the best a mere poetical dream; and, the moment reflection awakened, either sunk into doubt, or gave place to total incredulity. In the mysteries, it is true, or secret societies, whose influence was so extensive both in Egypt and in Greece, some more accurate and stable notions, with regard to a future life, appear to have been preserved and inculcated; but these, whatever they might be, were carefully confined to the small circle of the initiated. Both the earlier and later philosophers who sought to establish the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, had in general nothing farther in view than the indestructible nature of that intellectual principle of the universe, whereof, according to their belief, every human soul formed a part; they had no conception of any such thing as the continuance of personal existence. That doctrine—the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, properly so called—was first started, and first rendered popular among their philosophers by Pythagoras.—Even in his system, indeed, the truth was mingled with a considerable share of falsehood, for he embraced, in its full extent, the oriental doctrine of Metempsychosis, or

the transmigration of souls ; yet, as it is, he is, even in this respect, superior to all the other old philosophers of Greece, and is well entitled to our reverence, both as a discoverer of truth, and as a benefactor of his nation. But his celebrated society (whose chief aim was certainly political power,—and whose principles could not have been adopted without the total overthrow of the popular belief), was very soon dissolved ; and after that time the state of philosophy became daily more and more anarchical, down till the period of Socrates.

The contradiction and singularity of these opinions, invented and defended as they were with the greatest acuteness, and given to the world with the highest advantages of diction ;—the spirit of doubt and unbelief, which it is the tendency of such opinions to spread abroad ;—and the confusion of all ideas, and the relaxation of all principles which naturally follow from their adoption—were perhaps never displayed in all the fulness of their destructive influence, so manifestly as then. One great class of these ancient philosophers, however their opinions might differ on other matters, agreed in one thing—that they all regarded nature only on the side of the mutability and variety of her productions. ‘ Every thing,’ said they, ‘ is perpetually changing and revolving like the water of a river.’ So far indeed did they carry this prin-

ciple, that they refused to believe in the existence of any thing stedfast and enduring ; they denied that there could be any thing stable in being, any thing certain in knowledge, any thing universally useful in morals ;—in other words, they treated as a fable the existence, not of God alone, but of speculative truth, and practical rectitude.

Another party who held fast by the tenet of an unchangeable unity in all things, fell into an altogether opposite opinion. They denied the possibility of any mutability in that which *is*, and were thus reduced to deny the real existence of the sensible world. These paradoxes they endeavoured to render popular by the highest exertions of dialectic skill ; and in so far at least they were successful in their attempt, for the discussions which took place rendered doubt and uncertainty even more common than before. One of the first and greatest of these sophists commenced his instructions expressly and distinctly with the assertion,—that there is no such thing as truth, either absolute or relative ; that even if there were, it could not be within the reach of human knowledge, and that even if it were known, it would be altogether unprofitable. It would have been cruel indeed to deny this inquirer any private consolation which his DOUBT could afford him, if such had really been the poor and unsatisfactory result of a diligent and candid investigation. But

these sophists were not content to enjoy their doubt in privacy ; they had scholars and dependents in every district of Greece, and the education of the noble and cultivated classes of society was, for a season, entirely in their hands. Neither was the termination of their sceptical inquiries always candidly stated ; for while some were honest enough to confess that they knew nothing, there was no want of other sophists who had the impudence and the quackery to say that they knew all things, and who boldly professed themselves to be masters of every art and every science. It was, at all events, an easy matter for them to bring young men to such a pitch of accomplishment, that they could, by means of a few turnings and windings of sophistical argumentation, perplex and bewilder the understandings of others yet more inexperienced than themselves,— and believe themselves qualified to settle every thing by the rapid exercise of their own more cultivated genius, much better than had ever been done by the once reverenced, but now despised and insulted wisdom of their forefathers. In these schools, it was not merely proposed by way of an exercise of ingenuity and acumen, to defend alternately two opposite opinions concerning the same subject, and endeavour to lend either, according to pleasure, the semblance of truth ; the regular object of sophistical ambition was to defend on all occasions what

they knew to be speculatively or practically wrong ; to make the worse appear the better reason, not in scholastic disputation only, but in active life ;—and to forge weapons of deceit for the destruction of their fellow-citizens. With a bold contempt of all those moral principles,—by which, according to them, the weak only allow themselves to be conducted and deceived, but which *they*, in their wisdom, were pleased to consider as the silly prejudices of childishness and folly,—others expressly taught—that there is no virtue but that of cunning or of power,—and no right but the right of the stronger, and the pleasure of him who has the rule. In these schools, not only was ridicule perpetually cast on the popular belief, which with all its manifold defectiveness, was still closely connected with many feelings of a noble and dignified morality, which should have been carefully reverenced and preserved, so long as men had nothing better to be substituted in their room ;—not only did they heap together loose, vain, and despicable dogmas concerning the world and its first cause ; they denied, without hesitation, the very existence of a Deity, and annihilated within their bosoms all perception either of truth or of goodness.

Through the prevailing influence of these opinions, the political purity of Grecian governments, which had long stood in jeopardy on the brink of

an abyss of democratical lawlessness, was at last entirely overthrown: and sophistry had the merit of creating a spirit of corruption and debasement, which neither party-strife nor protracted wars, nor foreign bribery, nor bloody revolutions, had been able to produce.

+ In the midst of this universal atheism Socrates arose, and taught again the existence of a God in a manner altogether practical. He encountered the sophists on their own ground, and exposed to all the world the fallacy and nothingness of their opinions: he demonstrated to men, that virtue and goodness are not empty names, and convinced them, in spite of their prejudices, that in their own hearts are seated many pure and noble principles, derived at first from a superior being, and giving birth to perpetual aspirations after some state of things more analogous to the dignity of their original. He laid hold of the best feelings of our nature, and linked them all with the cause of his philosophy. By these means Socrates became the second founder and restorer of a more noble system of thinking among the Greeks, at the expence of falling himself a sacrifice to his zeal, and to the truth. But his death is so remarkable an incident in the history of mankind, that we may well pause for a moment, and bestow on it some farther consideration.

The solitary charge which was made against him, that he was guilty of teaching the existence of a new and unknown Godhead, and of despising the old and publicly recognised deities of the popular creed, was certainly so far founded in truth, and is most honourable to the fame of Socrates. Had the Socratic mode of thinking, which was in every respect new in Greece, ever gone beyond the circle of his own friends and disciples, and become the ruling one throughout the country, there can be no doubt that the whole system of private life among the ancients, and, at least, a great part of their popular belief, must have either been entirely changed, or at least undergone a very considerable modification. This must have been thoroughly felt by the narrow-minded bigots of the ancient faith, and is quite sufficient to account for the deadly hatred which they all bore to Socrates, and the readiness with which they endeavoured to confound his great name with that of the profligate and pernicious sophists whose principal enemy he was. The charge, nevertheless, was in a great measure a mere pretext, and the true ground of their hatred lay in the nature, not of the philosophical, but of the political tenets which Socrates maintained.

In every situation of his life, Socrates had shewn himself to be an excellent citizen, and a zealous

patriot; but his opinions, or at least those of the greater part of his scholars, were openly inimical to democracy. The manner in which both Xenophon and Plato often praise—almost with the zeal and warmth of political partisans—the constitution of Sparta, and that of every state in whose institutions the aristocratical principle was predominant, could have appeared only in the light of a disgusting want of national feeling, to the bigotted democrats of their native city. Besides, all the enemies of democracy who proceeded from the school of Socrates, were far from bearing characters so noble and irreproachable as Xenophon and Plato. Even Critias himself had been a disciple of Socrates.—Critias, one of the tyrants who ruled Athens by means of Spartan influence, and who indeed reduced their country to the state of a mere dependency on the government of Laedæmon. And to this very circumstance it is, that one ancient writer attributes, and with no small appearance of justice, the primary cause of the fate of Socrates.

It is impossible to explain, in any satisfactory method, by what means Socrates reached those peculiar principles which he professed. With the more ancient doctrines of his countrymen of the Ionian school, he was well acquainted; but he seems to have considered them as, on the whole, inadequate and unsatisfying. On several re-

markable occasions of his life, he had, according to his own account, recourse to a **DAEMON**, under whose guidance and tuition he professed himself uniformly to act; but whether he meant by this expression merely the suggestions and resolves of his own meditative spirit and uncorrupted conscience, or whether he really meant something of a nature still more elevated,—we have no means of deciding. It is equally out of our power to ascertain whether his private opinions pointed at a total overturn, or only at a partial modification, and more rational interpretation of the principles of the popular belief. He appears to have been well acquainted with all the doctrines inculcated in the mysterious societies of his day. It is indeed true, that he was far from being altogether divested of certain opinions and principles, which the philosophers of the eighteenth century do not hesitate to rank in the same class of infidelity, with the opinions of those all-knowing and all-doubting beings against whom Socrates was never weary of testifying. A single example will be enough to shew, with what unfairness and injustice, this part of his character has been treated by some of these writers. One of their chief objections to him is founded on the reply which he made to a question put to him by one of his friends, on the evening of his death. ‘ Is there nothing

‘ more which you wish us to do?’ said the friend.—‘ Nothing,’ answered Socrates, ‘ except that I wish you to offer a cock to *Aesculapius*.’—So then, say these modern critics, the last moment of his life was spent in commanding a mark of respect to be paid to that superstition, with whose worthlessness he must have been perfectly acquainted; or if it was a jest which he uttered, surely jesting was ill-suited for a moment so solemn. Perhaps if they had looked a little deeper, they might have found a more rational explanation. By the constant practice of antiquity, when any person had recovered from an illness, he offered a cock to *Aesculapius*. Now when Socrates expressed his wish to make a similar sacrifice, it is probable that he alluded to a notion which he himself entertained, and which has been illustrated at great length by several of his disciples—the notion that the present life is given us only to prepare us for another; or, according to the expression of antiquity, *that we may learn to die*. Besides, Socrates has often expressly said that he considered human life in general—and without doubt the state of the world in his day must have eminently tended to make him so consider it)—in the light of an imprisonment of the soul, or of a malady under which the nobler spirit is condemned to linger, until it be set free and purified by the healing touch of death.

To terminate life by suicide was held by Socrates, if not the first, at least the most distinctly of all the ancient philosophers, as a thing not permitted—as a crime against God and against ourselves. He made no attempt to emancipate himself, by his own hand, from the confinement and the malady of life. Perhaps he did not imagine, however much he must have been aware of the true dignity both of his own character and of the cause of truth and virtue in which he suffered, that that character and that cause would in after ages derive new reverence and dignity, from the example of resolution and stedfastness which he set before his friends and disciples in the manner of his death.

In order to give a general view of the Greek philosophy, I have selected only a few points, out of the great mass of their opinions; it has been my chief object to select those principally which may be traced in works not didactic, but historical—which have exerted the greatest influence on the affairs of active and political life, and from that circumstance are the most interesting as well as the most intelligible. I now return to my short survey of their most celebrated writers.

Xenophon is entitled, by his beautiful style alone, to take his place by the side of the best authors of antiquity. As a writer of history, he surpasses Thucydides, in so far that his narrative is more

light, and clear ; and that the feeling, with which his story is animated, is more simple and natural. Yet so much is he inferior both in depth and in dignity of reflection, that, tender and elegant as he is, we almost universally give the preference to the severe austerity of his more manly rival. As a philosophic writer, in his account of the conversation of Socrates, he falls infinitely short of Plato, not only in profoundness of thought, but in richness of illustration, and in the arrangement of his materials. His political romance upon the life of Cyrus is deserving of much notice, because it is the only work of that kind which has come down to us from the ancients. The work is composed, in almost equal parts, of history, poetry, and ethics. But, although each of the elements may be highly beautiful when taken by itself, the manner in which they are mingled together in the *Cyropædia*, appears to me, I must confess, very far from being a fit subject of imitation.

Although both Xenophon and several other writers of the school of Socrates, were conspicuous examples of simplicity and true beauty in composition, the sophistical rhetoric, nevertheless, continued to be almost universally prevalent among the Greeks. Isocrates may furnish us with abundant evidence of the wide extent to which that affected system of language and expression had been

adopted by this ingenious and spiritual people: how they could endure to hear long harangues upon particular points or circumstances, selected at the mere caprice of the speaker, and often not only inapplicable, but utterly useless and unprofitable, to the total exclusion of every thing which might really bear upon the merits of the case: how, in short, they could make their reason altogether subservient to their pleasure, and listen to the discussion of matters the most important to themselves, whether as individuals or as a nation, with feelings which might have better suited a drama or a show, as if the only matter on which they were to decide, had been the relative merits of eloquence or wit, in those who were so vain as to address them. There is an unvarying appearance of artifice in the system of speaking and writing, which was at this period in fashion. Every word is laboriously selected and arranged; every syllable is placed with reference, not only to its significance, but to its sound; every period is rounded with reiterated touches, and the whole is polished with indefatigable care. Yet this taste in composition, this extreme refinement of language—may be of considerable use to us; for we are but too apt to fall into an altogether opposite error, and to destroy or diminish the effect of our reasonings, by a very culpable inattention to the accuracy of our expression.

The art which is employed in writing should indeed be kept, as much as is possible, out of view. The consideration of the labour which must have been employed, is sometimes distressing to us even in works of sculpture; yet, in general, we allow ourselves to be delighted with an inanimate statue, long before we take time to reflect on the toil with which it has been formed. But the case is widely different here; the appearance of labour in a piece of writing, is, instantly and invariably, disagreeable. We know that a poem or an oration is not to be hewn out of stone, and we expect to see in it not barely a skilful application of art, but something free, lively, and having influence upon life.

Plato and Aristotle, whom I consider in this place merely as writers, are specimens, at once, of the widest extent of Grecian knowledge, and of the greatest depth and dignity of reflection, which were ever attained by the Grecian mind. The first has treated of philosophy, in narratives and dialogues, with all the fervour of an artist; the method of the other is more scientific in the strictest, as well as in the widest sense of that word: he has not confined himself to philosophy alone, he has treated of natural science also, and natural history; he has written on politics, on history, and on criticism,—and, in fact, reduced to a system, all the knowledge of the Greeks.

In the narrative and poetical passages of his dialogues,—above all, on account of his language and skill in composition, the general voice of his contemporaries, as well as of posterity, has set Plato at the head of all the prose-writers of antiquity. The most striking peculiarity of his style is its unrivalled variety; for it adapts itself with equal ease to the artificial abstractions and hairdrawn distinctions, into whose labyrinths he pursues his enemies the sophists,—and to the poetical, nay the often dithyambic boldness, with which he sets forth the rich fables and inventions of his own philosophy. Considered merely as works of narration, *Phædon* and the *Republick* are entitled to be classed with the most illustrious specimens of that species of writing to which Grecian genius has given birth.

Both of these mighty intellects, Aristotle and Plato, have for two thousand years exerted a commanding influence on the character of the human mind, both in Europe and in Asia. But to this I shall call your attention with more propriety, in some other place. Aristotle is characterised, as a writer, by purity and elegance, which began, in his time, to be looked upon as the first qualities of style. Although Plato has always been considered as a perfect model both in the power and in the construction of his language, and, in general, as a specimen of the highest point of refinement to which Grecian,

or more properly speaking, Attic genius ever attained,—yet there is no doubt that with regard to works of erudition, and the developement and acuteness of criticism, but above all, with regard to every department of historical composition, the influence of Aristotle has been more determinate, as well as more extensive, than that of Plato. The immediate successor of Aristotle, Theophrastus,—the same whose descriptions of characters have come down to us,—and all the early philosophers of the Platonic school, were men of universal refinement, and their writings were uniformly composed in a style at once elevated and beautiful. The philosophic sects which sprung up at a later period in Greece, appear to great disadvantage when compared, in this respect, with their predecessors. The followers of Epicurus make use of a careless, dull, and drawling mode of composition, while the writings of the Stoics are still more offensive on account of the bombast pedantry, and technical barbarisms with which they are loaded. The decline of the genius of the Greeks may be traced, through all its stages, in the corresponding debasement of their language.

The revival of philosophy, which was effected by Socrates, was very far from extending its influence to the whole of the intellectual character of the Greeks. This happy revolution was confined to a few particular departments of thinking, and these

were daily becoming more and more unconnected with the general spirit of that degraded people. On the poetry of Greece,—to which we must now return,—it exerted no influence whatever; *that* depended, so long as it deserved the name of poetry, on the mythology, the popular belief, the traditional tales, and the ancient modes of life of the country; after the national manners had become relaxed and corrupted, it exhibited merely a faint echo of what it had formerly been, in the hands of those great and creative geniuses, who have already passed under our review. But although in this later poetry we can see only the reflection of its ancient splendour; yet even the productions of this declining age are rich in particular beauties, and exhibit many glorious traces of that peculiar poetical spirit, which seems, in happier times, to have been almost inseparable from the physical temperament of the Greeks.

The first traces of decline in the art of composing tragedies, may be discovered, without difficulty, in the writings of Euripides; rich as these are in pathetic representations, and in isolated,—above all, in lyrical beauties. The last among the great tragedians of antiquity, appears less perfect than his predecessors in many respects; but his principal defect, certainly, consists in a want of unity and connection, between the different parts of which

his works are composed. I have already mentioned that the tragedy of the ancients arose, by degrees, out of a peculiar national chorus, and festival song of mythological import, which was usually performed in certain solemnities of the Greek religion. The chorus forms in this manner an inseparable part of the ancient tragedy, whose composition is for the same reason, in its whole shape and substance, strictly allied to lyrical poetry ;—a circumstance which has been very powerfully felt,—by those poets, in particular, who have endeavoured to imitate, in modern times, the peculiarities of the Grecian drama. Perfect harmony and agreement between the choral songs, and the dramatic part—strictly so called, forms, in tragedies composed after these models, a requisite altogether indispensable. Both are in the most entire unison in the works of Sophocles : but in Euripides, the choral interludes assume a character widely different ; they seem to be introduced into his plays, merely by way of compliment to established custom ; and, so far from being occupied with the events of the drama, are rendered, in general, vehicles for what has often no apparent connection with them,—the poet's own private opinions concerning the mythology and philosophy of his country. They abound indeed in lyrical beauties, which may be exquisite and delightful in themselves ; but these are perpetual

ly intermingled with formal dogmas, which the poet had gathered from the schools of the Sophists, and with long, pedantic, and ill-placed disquisitions, which seem to have no purpose in view, but an ostentatious display of his skill as a rhetorician. In consequence of this harmony being disturbed, and the lyrical interludes no longer forming an essential part of the piece; the dialogue itself, which now composes the whole of the tragedy, appears at once poor and unsatisfactory. To remedy, in some measure, this defect, Euripides has recourse to a perplexing intricacy of plot, to perpetual surprises and recognitions, to double catastrophes, and to wiredrawn intrigues,—which increase, indeed, the amusement of the spectacle, but can ill be reconciled with the true nature and dignity of tragic poetry.

The last Athenian poet, who represented human life in a manner new and peculiar to himself, was Menander—the inventor, or, at least, the perfecter of the *new comedy* as it was called. His method of composition; although his own works have almost entirely perished, is in some measure known to us, by means of the translations or imitations of the Roman poet Terence. The dramatic poetry of the Greeks which had begun, in Æschylus, with the heroic greatness and marvels of fabulous antiquity, had now reached the last stage of its history: it had been gradually descending from the

lofty images of a poetical *past*, towards the more humble concerns of the actual *present*; and it now terminated its career, with a spiritual and lively representation of all the circumstances, characters, situations, and intrigues, which are to be met with in the every-day life of undignified men. Whether the representation of common life, or, in other words, the popular comedy of Menander, belongs, properly speaking, to the class of poetry—was a question much agitated among the ancient critics. Many determine it in the negative, because, according to their opinion, not only versification but mythology is necessary to the existence of poetry. But, according to our ideas of poetry, the lively representation of human life, although this should be altogether unaccompanied with the marvellous, or even with the elevated, can in no way be separated from the region of poetry. According to modern critics, the first and original end of all poetry,—if we consider it as it is to have influence on men and on life, and, in one word, as it is to be national,—is, to preserve and embellish the peculiar traditions and recollections of the people; and to preserve alive, in the memories of men, the magnanimity and greatness of ages that are gone by. The peculiar sphere of this poetry is epic narrative,—where there is the utmost scope for the introduction of the marvellous, and where the poet-

cannot move a step without the assistance of mythology. But a second end of poetry, is to place before our eyes a clear and speaking picture of common life. This may certainly be done in many modes of writing; but most powerfully, without doubt, in the drama. Poetry, however,—such as deserves the name—can never consist entirely in representations of external life; it must always be intermingled with something of a higher nature,—and have for its object the intellect and feeling of which that life is the symbol. Perhaps it might even be said that the essence of poetry, as directed to this second purpose, consists, in truth, in this, at first sight, unessential element of higher and more refined feeling, with which the whole substance of the composition is apparently diversified, but really inspired. This feeling and inspiration form indeed a constituent part of all poetry; but in proportion as they come to be predominant qualities, the compositions in which they are embodied, approach nearer to the nature of lyrical poetry.

The essence of all poetry may be said to consist in three things, INVENTION, EXPRESSION, INSPIRATION. In a great inventive genius, the other two elements,—expression and inspiration—can scarcely be absent. But without any creative or inventive power, properly so called,—

most certainly, without any admixture of the marvellous,—a work of intellect and language may, by the power of expression alone, which it displays, or by the inspiration with which it is animated, fulfil the ends, and be entitled to the name, of poetry.

Menander was the last original poet of Athens who represented human life, and whose writings exerted their influence on human affairs. If we consider his comedies as the conclusion of Attic literature, the whole period during which that literature existed, reckoning from the time of Solon, does not extend beyond three centuries.

The poets who arose at an after period, when the language of Greece had become known over the greater part of the world, by means of the conquests of Alexander, and who attached themselves, for the most part, to the court of the Egyptian Ptolemies, are only to be considered as gleaners, who came after the rich harvest of Greek poetry had been already gathered in. These courtly literati,—the academicians, and librarians of Alexandria,—have, however, been of much service to the world, in consequence of the labour which they bestowed, on preserving entire the purity and clearness of the Greek language; as well as of the erudition and criticism which are embodied in their own works. As poets, they have all the defects into which learned poets are apt to fall; their mode

of expression is rarely unaffected, and very often altogether obscure. Those of their number who attempted epic poetry—or, in general, who treated of subjects connected with mythology, are at least valuable on this account, that their works have mainly contributed towards enabling us, in modern times, to understand the allusions, and feel the force of the more ancient poets. It is, for instance, extremely fortunate for us, (especially as the writings of so many older poets who handled the same fable have perished) that the chivalric expedition of the Argonauts forms the subject of one of the most elegant of these later poets,—Apollonius. In consequence of the immense profusion of ancient poems which were at that time extant, it was perhaps easy for these Alexandrians, to penetrate into the original meaning and connection of the mythological fictions, more deeply, than had ever been consistent either with the views or the opportunities of the narrative poets, of the flourishing era. Callimachus, in particular, was conspicuous for the profound knowledge which he possessed, of the ancient traditions of Greece; mythology was the exclusive subject of his poetry, and he often treated it with the true fire of a poet. That he was by no means deficient in this, is indeed evident from the writings of the enthusiastic Propertius, who made him his

model in the composition of his elegies. It was at this period very common to treat of mythological events in a formal manner, collecting all the fictions of a similar class into the same work. Nothing, however, could be more vain ; for there is, in truth, no sort of connection between many of these inventions. They are often various editions of the same fable ; and to arrange them in a consecutive order, could only be accomplished, by means of such artificial omissions, and unnatural interlacings, as are to be met with in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid.

It has everywhere been the fate of poetry, in its decline, to be more and more taken away from its proper subjects, and applied to matters altogether incapable of poetical illustration. It requires no great acuteness to see, that scientific astronomy is a subject of this kind ; and that a dissertation on some particular department of botany, or a series of medical lectures, although composed in verse, can never form a poem. It is evident that the whole body of this learned poetry which has come down to us from the Alexandrian age, belongs to a false and utterly artificial class of compositions. The moderns should have been the more careful to avoid imitating these productions, that such subjects are even more difficult to be handled in a poetical manner now, than they were in the time of

the Greeks. In the first place, the Greeks of a more early period had applied didactic poetry to a great number of subjects entirely scientific in their nature, not with the design of displaying their skill in the treatment of difficult and repulsive materials, but for the real purpose of communicating knowledge; at a time when prose writing was either entirely unknown, or in a state so unpolished as not to be a fit vehicle for general information, or not so easy for the authors themselves as the hexameter verse. Their scientific poetry was therefore unaffected in its origin, and proceeded from the natural audacity of the Grecian intellect; a circumstance which must have been of great use to the artificial poets who treated of scientific subjects at a later period. The mythology of the Greeks, moreover, embraced the whole visible world within the circle of its bold personifications and delightful fables; so that nothing in truth could be imagined which was not connected in some manner with these beautiful fictions, and thus placed within the proper province of ancient poetry. Even in treating of a botanical or medical subject, innumerable circumstances must have occurred to a Grecian poet, which might give him an opportunity of borrowing poetical illustrations from the world of fables; and of introducing, without any appearance of stiffness or constraint, those episodes which formed

in truth the principal charm of his composition, but which must always be far-fetched and artificial in the writings of a modern.

There is one species of poetry invented in this period, which is much more agreeable to our taste ; because it is not a mere display of art and imitation, but professes to set before us the peculiarities of a particular mode of life. I mean the bucolic and pastoral poetry ; the Idylls of Theocritus, and other ancient writers of the same class. The country life certainly abounds in circumstances susceptible of poetical embellishment ; but, I confess, I can perceive no good reason, why it should be considered in an isolated manner, and abstracted from its due situation in that general picture of the world and of human life, which it is the province of poetry to unfold. Let us reflect for a moment on these passages in the heroic poems of antiquity, or in the chivalric romances of the moderns, which afford us glimpses of the simplicity and repose of rural manners ;—their simplicity appears still more innocent, and their repose still more peaceful, from the situation in which they are placed,—in the midst of the guilty tumult of wars, and the fierce passions of heroes. Here every thing appears in its true and natural connection ; and the poetry is as varied, as the world and the men which it professes to represent. The cutting off of rural life, and making

the description of it a separate department of writing, has led poets into perpetual tautologies and repetitions, and induced the more ambitious of them, to have recourse to the most unnatural exaggerations. It is very singular that this species of writing should have always been cultivated and popular, only in ages of great social refinement. The excess of refinement in the life of cities, has been the means of leading us back to nature, and the country. Most Idylls, indeed, betray their origin ; and it is too often quite evident, that the shepherds and shepherdesses whom they represent, are in fact gentlemen and ladies in disguise. In Theocritus, without doubt, and in many of the other bucolic poets of antiquity, we see some true rustics, and hear the natural language of unsophisticated shepherdesses. But, even in them, there is introduced so much elegance of language, and so much play of wit, that we are, every now and then, led to forget the rural scenes in which we are supposed to be placed, and to feel that we are still in the midst of the social refinements of the courts of Ptolemy, or Augustus. In general, the Idylls were what their name expresses :—little poetical pictures, representations in miniature, sometimes of mythological subjects, at other times of matters in common life, but almost always amatory in their purpose and termination. Poetry had now

become utterly degraded from her ancient dignity, split into unnatural divisions, and deprived of the strength which she formerly possessed. The exhaustion of her powers became, daily, more and more manifest, in the diminutiveness of all her productions. She soon gave birth to nothing, but little trifling buds and flowerets. Puns, conceits, and quibbles, were the fashion of the day. The age of poetry was gone, when that of anthologies commenced.

LECTURE III.

**BETROSPPECT—INFLUENCE OF THE GREEKS ON THE ROMANS—
SKETCH OF ROMAN LITERATURE.**

AFTER the Greeks had ceased to be a nation, their literature became, daily, more and more unconnected with the affairs of active life. This was first, and most conspicuously the fate of their philosophy, whose scientific principles were at all times in opposition to the popular faith, and whose lofty conceptions were now no longer in unison with the degraded feelings of that fallen nation. Historical information became, indeed, much more extensive, and historical literature received a more scientific form, and was applied to a greater variety of subjects than of old. But the vigour of ancient conceptions, and the free spirit of ancient inquiry, was for ever gone. The art of rhetoric increased, daily, in public opinion, and soon came to form almost the only subject of public interest and amusement. If a fantastical and sophistical abuse of this art was not

uncommon, even in the older and better times of Greece, it is easy to see to what extent that must now have prevailed, when her political independence was entirely lost, and the public taste, even in language, was utterly debased. Even poetry, with which the whole mental cultivation of Greece began, had descended from her original eminence, and become reduced to the rank of an art, which men supposed might be acquired by means of rules and practice, like a handicraft. Even poetry could not be exempted from the influence of the degradation which surrounded her. The fate of sculpture was much more fortunate, perhaps because that art has less connection with the affairs of active life. The artist laboured on, in the seclusion of his workshop, to embody in marble the lofty conceptions of preceding ages, without regard to the political degradation or moral corruption of the time in which he lived. It is true that the relaxation of manners gave rise to a certain effeminacy and perversion of taste even in sculpture; but this evil was far from being so widely prevalent, as the corresponding corruptions in the sister arts. There is no doubt that very many of those works of ancient sculpture and architecture, whose beauty and perfection still appear to us unrivalled, were the production of the same age, which saw oratory and poetry reduced altogether to a state of decay and degradation.

In those sciences, which are the most unconnected with external life, and have little dependence on the political or private manners of a nation, the inventive genius of the Greeks still displayed itself in all its brilliancy and strength. In the mathematics, although they were destitute of many instruments which have been invented by modern ingenuity, and which now appear altogether indispensable, they made great progress both in geometry and astronomy; and the true system of the universe, which had, it is supposed, been guessed at, in a much earlier age, by the Pythagoreans, was now perfectly known and recognised by at least a great number of their philosophers. The wonder-working science and ingenuity of Archimedes were such, as to strike even the Romans with terror and amazement; and although they had no better system of numeration than the very defective one of letters, and were even ignorant of reckoning by decimals, the Greeks may boast of having produced, in Euclid, a geometrical writer, whose works are esteemed of classical authority, even by the profoundest mathematicians of modern times. Medicine, which had always been a favourite pursuit among the Greeks, now became one of their principal occupations, and furnished them with free scope for the exercise of all their acuteness, inventiveness, and love of systems. It was not only by

means of their literature, and their eminence as rhetoricians and grammarians, but also, in no inconsiderable degree, by means of their skill as artists, mathematicians, and physicians, that the Greeks acquired their power over Roman intellect;—a power which,—however much the old Roman prejudices were at first against it, made daily progress after the two nations had been brought fairly into contact, and, in consequence of the capture of Tarentum, and the subjection of Magna Grecia and Sicily to the Roman arms, soon became a matter of indispensable necessity to the whole habits of the victorious people. Twice were the Greek rhetoricians and philosophers banished from Rome by a decree of the senate; and the elder Cato, that undistinguishing enemy of every thing that was Greek, could not even abide that Greek physicians should cure Roman maladies. He depicted these practitioners as impious sorcerers, who contradicted the course of nature, and restored dying men to life by means of unholy charms—and advised his countrymen to remain stedfast, not only by their old Roman principles and manners, but also by the venerable unguents and balsams which had come down to them from the wisdom of their grandmothers. How necessary the Greek rhetoricians, and the teachers of the Greek arts and language, had become to the Romans, may be gather-

ed from the speedy appearance of a second decree of banishment—which shews that very little attention had been paid to the injunctions of the first. Nor is it difficult to discover the origin of all this. The Greek language was, at that time, universally diffused throughout the whole of the civilised world. The poems of Homer were read in the remotest districts of Asia; even the Indians were not, in all probability, entirely ignorant of Grecian literature; while, in the farthest extremity of the west, Carthaginian navigators described their voyages of discovery, and Hannibal himself wrote the history of his wars, in the language of the Greeks. After the conquest of southern Italy and Sicily, whose language was almost entirely Greek, and still more after they had by degrees acquired the dominion of Macedonia and Achaia, a knowledge of this language must have become every day more and more necessary to the Romans, especially on account of the many historical works which the Greeks possessed, respecting all those nations and countries, with which the extended circle of their political operations had now brought that ambitious people into contact. The Greek language was adopted even by the Romans, who attempted, about that period, to write the history of their own nation; and the Greek Polybius, who came to Rome as a hostage in the course of the Achaian wars, was the

first who described, to this great people, the state of the world, and the political relations of its inhabitants, in a work which,—at least in a political point of view,—must always be considered as classical even by the latest posterity. Livius Andronicus, a Greek taken captive at Tarentum, who was acquainted with the Latin language, first enabled the Romans to hear and read the *Odyssey* in the rude disguise of their native tongue; and, afterwards, by means of his translations, introduced them to some acquaintance with the pleasures of theatrical exhibitions, and the riches of the Grecian drama. But it is not to be denied that the principal inducement, which led first the Romans of high rank, and afterwards the whole of the nation, to admire and imitate the institutions and language of the Greeks, was unquestionably this; a knowledge of the language and manners of the Greeks, was a necessary step to an acquaintance with their rhetoric. Eloquence, even in Rome, exerted, over political events, an influence always powerful, not unfrequently imperative and conclusive: and, in the more troublesome times which followed the period of Gracchus, the popular passion became every day more violent, for all the instruments of this art,—in spite of the remonstrances of some sturdy patriots, who condemned it as a system of sophistry, not only dangerous to the welfare of

the state, but utterly inimical to the progress and soundness of the human intellect.

The later literature of the Romans is such as to keep us perpetually in mind of its origin ; and few are now disposed to question the truth of the common assertion,—that the Roman writers are in general mere imitators of the Greeks.

It is absolutely necessary that those nations who make their appearance at a later period of the history of the world, as well as of the general development of human intellect, should derive a great part of their mental cultivation, as a legacy from the polished nations of the more early times ; and this implies, in itself, no reproach. It were preposterous to introduce into literature the petty ideas of a mercantile town ; and to insist that the writers of each nation should labour to make their productions as different as possible from those of their neighbours. To make use of the cultivation of another people is far from disgraceful : it is only necessary that we preserve our substantial individuality as a nation, that we do not part with the original peculiarities of our language and mode of thinking, nor sacrifice what is most our own, out of an extravagant admiration for what belongs originally to others. Knowledge is in itself the common property of all nations ; and the genius of a poet or of a philosopher, who aspires to exert a commanding influence on his fellow-

countrymen, is exalted and enriched by a retrospect to the high points of perfection,—in art, in reflection, in spirit, and in language,—to which the men of former ages and other countries have attained.

That imitation alone is lifeless which aims not to extend the field, and increase the power of native genius, but merely to appropriate peculiar species of writing used by a foreign nation,—an attempt which can seldom be crowned with entire success; and to reach, by elaborate artifice, beauties, whose very existence depends, in a great measure, on their being altogether natural and unsought.

The literature of Rome has fallen in some measure into both of these errors. Her writers both neglected the ancient and national traditions of their own country; and bestowed much unprofitable labour on the imitation of foreign modes of writing—which, as soon as they are transplanted from their native soil, for the most part assume the appearance of unproductiveness, coldness and death,—or, at best, protract a lingering and inefficient life, like the sickly exotics of a green-house.

There is nevertheless a character peculiar to the writers of Rome, by means of which, in spite of the servility with which they have, in general, imitated their models and originals in the literature of Greece, their works have obtained an appearance of dignity and worthiness, that are altogether their

own. This, indeed, belongs not so much to themselves as to their nation,—to Rome, the great point of union between the ancient and the modern world.

The artist who excels in sculpture or painting, must be altogether animated and inspired, with one great and in-dwelling idea which occupies his whole soul; an idea for which he forgets all others, in which alone he lives, and to which all his works are entirely subservient.—His masterpieces are mere attempts to body forth, and render visible to others, the greatness of those conceptions, which have their residence within the depths of his own mind. In like manner, every true poet, and every great inventive author, must be filled with some idea peculiarly his own, and all-powerful over his soul—which is the central point and focus of his intellect—to which every thing else is subordinate—and of which the writings, wherein he embodies his spirit, are but the ministers, interpreters, and tools.—Here it is that the superiority of Greeks over Romans is manifest and triumphant. Think only of the great poets of the glorious time of Greece—of *Æschylus*, *Pindar*, *Sophocles*;—or of the patriotic poet of the populace, *Aristophanes*—or of the orator *Demosthenes*—or of the two first of historians, *Herodotus* and *Thucydides*—or those profoundest of thinkers, *Aristotle* and *Plato*. In each of these great authors

we shall find a distinct and peculiar spirit of reflection, a peculiar manner of narration, a peculiar form of composition ; even with regard to style and language, the first time we open the pages of one of these master-spirits, we feel as if we were transplanted into an unknown world. Thus rich and manifold was the genius of the Greeks ; but we should seek in vain for so great a spirit of originality, among the Roman writers—yet there is something in them which atones for this defect—they also have their high—their great idea : not that the individuals are so favoured ; but the possession is common to them all ; it is the idea of ROME :—of Rome so wonderful in her ancient manners, and laws—so great even in her errors, and her crimes ;—of Rome so eternally remarkable for the unrivalled dominion with which she ruled the world. It is this spirit which breathes from the lips of every Roman,—and which stamps a character of independent dignity and grandeur, even on his most slavish imitations of the writings of the Greeks.

The greatness, and the political activity of the state, on the one hand,—and the power and audacious exertion of intellect in the individuals of which the state is composed, on the other—are by the nature of things, in some measure opposed to each other ; although it be unquestionably both a natural

and a proper feeling, which makes every good citizen wish equal success to political energy and individual genius, in the country to which he belongs.

As affairs are constituted, this much is certain, that so manifold and various a developement of human faculties as that which took place in Greece, can never occur in any state where the principle of patriotism has attained a certain point of predominance;—where men have no thoughts and no feelings which are not occupied and penetrated with the greatness and the glory of their country. It was necessary that Athens should have been as free as she really was,—sufficiently free to allow a large portion of her citizens to abstract themselves altogether from political concerns, without any danger to their political privileges—before she could have displayed, as she has done, in every department of intellect and art, the unrivalled energies of the Grecian genius. Sparta was the only state in Greece, constituted as such, at once virtuously and powerfully; the only state whose triumphs were not confined to temporary dominion and success, but extended to a strong, a sound, and an enduring political existence. These advantages were not to be gained without some sacrifice: and Sparta chose to obtain them by adopting a system of municipal institutions, the tendency of which was to confine

the whole thoughts and manners of her citizens, within a particular range. She was content to be without philosophers and poets, provided she could only have sagacious statesmen and intrepid warriors ; and he who, had he been born in Athens, might have become a Sophocles or a Plato, envied, at Lacedæmon, no other names but those of Lycurgus and Leonidas.

But I must illustrate the truth of my position respecting the Roman authors, by a recurrence to individual examples.—Is it not clear that in Cæsar—or even in Cicero—(considering both of these merely as writers), there is a something which sets them at once far before the rhetoricians, grammarians, philosophers and sophists, whose pupils they evidently are in all that regards language, eloquence, and mode of thinking, and to whom they are so often and so obviously inferior in the acuteness, and the scientific knowledge, which it is one principal object of their writings to display. Every one must feel that here, as in all the works of the great Roman writers, there breathes a spirit very different from that of the corrupted sophistry of the later age of Greece. This is not the genius, or the peculiar spirit of the authors themselves ; it is the idea of Rome, the idea of the solitary grandeur of their country, which, although its operations be

very different; alike animates them all; and, like the unseen spirit of life, pervades and illuminates the whole body of their writings.

That the Romans learned or borrowed every thing from the Greeks, and had, in reality, nothing which was peculiarly and from antiquity their own, is very far from the truth. We should come nearer the mark, if we should say that, through the overmastering influence of Greek manners and Greek authors, the Romans of a later period were induced to forget what they ought most carefully to have cherished and preserved—the old heroic tales and national poems of their ancestors. These surely were the productions of an age far preceding any knowledge or imitation of Grecian models; and yet, so much have they been despised, that we can scarcely perceive any trace of their existence except in certain relics—which have been transferred from true poetry to the half-fabulous histories of the infant ages of Rome. In many passages of those Roman writers, who were the best acquainted with the ancient usages and manners of their country, allusion is made to the existence of certain old songs, whose purpose was to celebrate the illustrious actions of their early ancestors, and which had commonly been sung at their religious festivals, as well as at the private entertainments of the Roman nobles.—There then were heroic

poems, wherein the patriotic feelings and the poetical genius of the Romans found means to express themselves, long before the Romans became the pupils of the Greeks, and acquired from them, along with that sophistical eloquence of which I have already said so much, a style of poetry more regular and learned, and, in every thing which respects prosody and language, incomparatively more polished than that which they had of old possessed. If it should be asked what were the subjects of these old Roman poems? the Roman histories, I conceive, may easily furnish us with an answer. Not only the fabulous birth and fate of Romulus, and the rape of the Sabine women, but also, the most poetical combat of the Horatii and Curiatii;—the pride of Tarquin;—the misfortune and death of Lucretia, with their bloody revenge, and the establishment of liberty by the elder Brutus;—the wonderful war of Porsenna, and the stedfastness of Scœvola,—the banishment of Coriolanus, the war which he kindled against his country,—the subsequent struggle of his feelings, and the final triumph of his patriotism at the all-powerful intercession of his mother:—these and the like circumstances, if they be examined from the proper point of view, cannot fail to be considered as the relics and fragments of the ancient heroic traditions and heroic poems of the Romans. As such they are of

great value; and that cannot be diminished, by any difficulties which the mere historical student may experience, in reconciling the discrepancies of narrative, or explaining the obscurities of allusion, with which, in their present condition, they abound. That many things which, of right, belong to these ancient poems, still exist under the disguise of an historical clothing; that in Livy, above all, the spirit and power of these old songs is often the predominant inspiration of the narrative,—has indeed very frequently been conjectured. But it was reserved for a learned inquirer of our own time, Niebuhr, to take these compositions to pieces, and to detect, with a felicity which has seldom been equalled, the modern inventions and additions by which incidents, in themselves unconnected, have been artificially conjoined. This critic has indeed taken away from the Roman history; but we have gained through his means a more accurate acquaintance with the nature of the ancient Roman traditions which we possess.—Before the rhythm and artifices of Greek versification had weaned Roman ears from their affection for the simple sounds of their own songs, these historical or heroic adventures were sung in a loose sort of verses, which the ancient Italians called *Saturnalian*; and which, excepting that they had no rhyme, bore a strong resemblance to those lawless *Alexandrines*, as they were called,

of which almost all the nations of Europe made use, during the period of the middle ages.

These heroic ballads of the more early Romans,—if we may judge of their general import from the materials which they have furnished to the Roman historians—seem to have aimed at the narration of no incident which did not belong to their country, and at the expression of no feelings but such as were purely patriotic. We perceive in them indeed no inconsiderable admixture of love for the marvellous;—but even that propensity seems to have been exclusively national in its character and spirit; for the Roman fablers appear to have indulged themselves in the creation of no wonders, which might not rebound, in some measure, to the honour of their ancestors. It is much to be regretted that the manifold witchery of the *Odyssey*, and the perfect harmony of the ever various hexameter, should have made so entire a conquest of the ears and souls of the Romans, as to leave no room for a more affectionate preservation of these ancient poems of their country.

There is however another reason which tended, in no inconsiderable degree, to render the Romans indifferent, if not averse, to their heroic legends; and which must have mainly contributed towards bringing these into a state of neglect, the consequences of which have been that, with the excep-

tion of those fragments which have been imperfectly preserved in the shape of a half-fabulous and ill-connected chronicle, they have been utterly lost, not only to the history of Rome, but to that of the world itself, of which Rome became afterwards the mistress. The last heroic personage of the old Roman history is Camillus, who delivered Rome from her invaders the Gauls. He falls within the period both of tradition and of poetry, and there can be no doubt that his fame was transmitted in songs, to the posterity of those whom he had set free. With the expulsion of the Gauls the historical period of Rome begins. During the time when they ravaged the country, the ancient monuments must in a great measure have perished; for every thing previous to this epoch is dark and doubtful—even that which is founded on fact, is perpetually intermingled with a texture of fabulous inventions. From this time, moreover, the true period of Roman greatness commences. In a historical point of view, it is even the proper period of Roman heroism; and to it we may probably refer the composition of those old heroic songs, of which Cato and Cicero make mention, and which Ennius and even Livy had perpetually before their eyes.

Now the older traditions concerning the kings and heroes of the infant city, the establishment of its republican government, and the vicissitudes of its ear-

ly fate, were near enough to this age of Roman valour and virtue, to be still felt with all that power and pressure, which are necessary to make such events the fit subjects of national poetry. But at a period somewhat later, the case was widely different. After the subjection of Tarentum, Italy, Sicily, Macedonia, Carthage, Spain, and Achaia, there could have been comparatively little sympathy between the petty Rome of antiquity,—of her that made war against the Sabines, or beleaguered the town of Veii for as many years as Agamemnon did Troy—and mighty Rome pressing on to the dominion of the world, with an irresistible rapidity, and an unwavering confidence in the ascendancy of her victorious star.—The Greeks were, even from the remotest times, a numerous nation, divided into many tribes, and having possession of extensive territories. But the original patrimony of the Romans consisted of a single village, and they had formed themselves, first, into an independent, and afterwards into a conquering people, entirely by the incorporation of foreigners who took little interest in the traditions of their earliest achievements.

It was, therefore, an inevitable consequence of the nature of the things themselves, and of the progress of events, that these ancient patriotic traditions and poems should gradually sink into ne-

glect—at least that they should never form the groundwork of a polished and developed literature—and, in short, that the Romans should adopt in their stead the thoughts, the recollections, and the poetry of the Greeks. The blame of this should by no means be exclusively attached to Ennius; although it be true that the acute historical critic, whom I have cited above, has accused that writer of maliciously calumniating and depressing these ancient compositions, in order that he himself might be considered as the author and founder of Roman poetry. It is however certain that Ennius boasted, with much openness, that he was animated with three different souls—in allusion to his knowledge of three languages—Greek—Latin—and Oscian or ancient Italian. And there is no improbability in the supposition that a man who did so, was not a little proud of his success—(imperfect as that really was)—in transferring the music of the Greek hexameter into another tongue. The greatest of poets are not always exempt from this sort of vanity; and often attach a very undue weight to some merely external circumstances in their composition. They judge too much of the value of what they have done, by the labour which it has cost them to do it; and think little, on the other hand, of those qualities which form their real excellence—nay are sometimes almost unconscious of the exist-

ence of that internal inspiration, which animates their genius and awakens our sympathy. Ennius, for instance, appears to have thought more about his versification than his poetry: and to have too much despised the old poets of his native country, merely because they had not, like himself, made use of the rich and various measures of the Greeks. Yet there is no doubt that Ennius was a true poet. In many of his verses which have been preserved by succeeding writers, there breathes the noble spirit of genuine emotion. But even if every fragment of his writings had perished, the admiration with which he was regarded by Lucretius, would have been sufficient to place him high in our esteem. That illustrious poet, it is well known, considered Ennius as his master and his model: His genius was of a kindred order; and he bore to him a strong resemblance, both in the turn of his thoughts and the flow of his diction.

From this time the imitation of the Greek writers proceeded rapidly, although not with uniform success. Of all the compositions of the Greeks, their histories and their orations were most interesting to the Romans, and most akin to their political habits. They were consequently most fortunate in their imitations of these modes of writing. The Greek philosophy on the other hand was always foreign to them: and the success of their imi-

tations of Greek poetry was very different in the different departments of the art.

In the drama the Romans were perpetually making attempts, from the time of Ennius downwards. In truth however they have left nothing in that department of poetry except translations from the Greek,—more or less exact, but never executed with sufficient spirit to entitle them even to the less servile name of *imitations*. The lost tragedians, Pacuvius and Attius, were mere translators; and the same thing may be said of the two comic poets Plautus and Terence, whose writings are in our hands. That old domestic species of bantering comedy, which was known by the Oscian name of *fabula atellana*, was not however entirely laid aside. It still preserved its place as an amusement of society in the merry meetings of the nobles; who, in the midst of all their foreign refinements, were willing, now and then, to revive in this way their recollections of the national sports and diversions of their Italian ancestry.—With the exception of this low species of buffoon writing, the Romans never possessed any thing which deserved to be called a dramatic literature of their own. With regard to their translations from the Greek tragedians, one principal cause of their stiffness and general want of success was this,—that the mythology, which forms the essence of these compositions, was in fact foreign to

the Roman people. It is very true that the general outline of the Roman mythology was originally copied from that of the Greeks, but the individual parts of the two fabries were altogether different, and local. Iphigenia and Orestes were always more or less foreigners to a Roman audience; and the whole drama in which these and similar personages figured, never attained in Rome any more healthy state of existence, than that of an exotic in a green-house, which is only preserved from death by the daily application of artificial heat and unsatisfying labour. The names of the individual tragedies, which were supposed to be the best of their kind in the time of Augustus, may suffice to shew us how narrow was the circle in which the Roman dramatists moved, and how soon their tragic art has reached the termination of its progress. The same thing may easily be gathered from a consideration of those orations in dramatic form which are commonly ascribed to Seneca.—In like manner the representation of the foreign manners of Athens, which perpetually occupied the Roman comedy, must have appeared to Roman spectators at once cold and uninteresting. It is no difficult matter to perceive the reasons, why the witchery of pantomime and dance soon supplanted at Rome every other species of dramatic spectacle.

There is one of a still more serious nature upon

which I have not yet touched. The Roman people had by degrees become accustomed to take a barbarous delight in the most wanton displays of human violence and brutal cruelty. Hundreds of lions and elephants fought and bled before their eyes; even Roman ladies could look on, and see crowds of hireling gladiators wasting energy, valour, and life, on the guilty arena of a circus. It is but too evident that they who could take pleasure in spectacles such as these, must very soon have lost all that tenderness of inward feeling, and all that sympathy for inward suffering, without which none can perceive the force and beauty of a tragic drama.—Still, however, it may unquestionably appear a strange thing, that, since the Romans did make many attempts at the composition of tragedies, they should never have chosen their subjects from the ancient history or traditions of their country;—more particularly when we consider that the tragedians of modern times have borrowed, from these very sources, many subjects of a highly poetical nature, and, at the same time, far from being unsusceptible of dramatic representation,—such as the combat of the Horatii, the firmness of Brutus, the internal conflict and changed spirit of Coriolanus,—restoring in this way to poetry what was originally among the most rightful of her possessions. To find a satisfactory solution of this difficulty, we must examine

into the nature of these neglected themes.—The patriotic feelings embodied in these traditions, were too much akin to the feelings of every Roman audience, to admit of being brought forward upon a stage. The story of Coriolanus may serve as an example. How could a Roman poet have dared to represent this haughty patrician in the full strength of his disdain and scorn of plebeians, at the time when the Gracchi were straining every nerve to set the plebeians free from the authority of the nobles? What effect must it have had, to introduce the banished Coriolanus upon a Roman stage, reproaching, in his merited indignation, with bitter words and dear-bought mockery, the jealous levity of his countrymen—at a time when the noblest and the most free-spirited of the last Romans, Sertorius, from his place of exile, among the unsubdued tribes of Spain and Lusitania, meditated more complete revenge against similar ingratitude, and was laying plans for the destruction of the old, and the foundation of a second Rome? Or how could a Roman audience have endured to see Coriolanus represented as approaching Rome at the head of an hostile and victorious army, at the time when Sylla was in reality at open war with his country; or even at a somewhat later period, when the principal events of his history must have still been familiar and present to the recollection of his country-

men? Not in these instances alone, but in the whole body of the early traditions and history of Rome, the conflict between patricians and plebeians occupied so pre-eminent a place, as to render Roman subjects incapable of theatrical representation during the times of the republic. Much more does this apply to the age of Augustus and his successors, when, indeed, Brutus and the ancient consular heroes could not have failed to be the most unwelcome of all personages. We may find sufficient illustrations of these remarks in the history of the modern drama. For, although Shakespeare has not hesitated to represent the civil wars of York and Lancaster on the English stage, we must observe, that before he did so, these wars had entirely terminated; and the recurrence of similar events could not easily have been foreseen by one living in the pacific times of James. With regard to our German drama, it is true that our tragic poets have chosen many of these most interesting subjects from our civil tumults—particularly from the thirty years war; but even here the case is very different from what it would have been among the Romans. The Germans are indeed countrymen, but they are not all subjects of the same state. And yet with us, the poets who handle such topics at much length, have a very difficult task to perform; they have need of much delicacy to avoid wounding or perhaps reviving

the feelings of parties, and thus destroying the proper impression which their poetry should make.

Such are the reasons why the Romans had no national tragedies ; and why, in general, they had no such thing as a theatre of their own.

Among their poets who applied themselves to other departments of the art, Lucretius stands by himself in Roman literature, whether we consider the subjects, or the spirit of his writings. Perhaps, indeed, he may give us something like an idea of the style and manner of the more ancient Roman poets. By the later Romans he was little thought of ; they neither felt his beauties, nor appreciated his genius. His work *concerning the nature of things*, belongs to that species of writing, which arose among the Greeks out of particular circumstances in their history, and which among them only was a national mode of composition—the didactic poetry of science. The philosophy which he has chosen to illustrate, was the worst which he could have selected, either as a Roman or as a poet. The system of Epicurus I mean, which annihilates all belief and all lofty feeling ; which, in a scientific point of view, is connected with the most absurd of hypotheses ; which in its influence on life, if not immoral, is at least selfish and unpatriotic, and which, above all, is the deadly enemy of every thing like fancy and poetry. It is true that Lucretius has mastered all

these difficulties ; but who can see without regret a spirit so noble, as that which is everywhere apparent in his writings, devoted and enslaved to a destructive system of Grecian sophistry ? In inspiration, and in sublimity, he is the first of Roman poets ; as a painter and worshipper of nature, he is the first of all the poets of antiquity whose writings have come down to us. With regard to the species of writing which he adopted, and in general with regard to the place which nature should occupy in poetical compositions, I shall now make a few general remarks.

And in the first place, I think it will be admitted on all hands that poetry may choose the subject of her descriptions as well as the source of her inspiration, not only in human beings themselves, but with equal propriety in the external nature with which they are surrounded. In the poetry of nature, as in the poetry of man, there is room for a three-fold distinction. The poetry of man may be, first, a clear mirror of actual life and the present ; or secondly an embodying of the recollections of a marvellous antiquity, and departed age of heroic actions and adventures ; or thirdly, if it be in the hands of a poet who desires rather to inspire than to describe, it may consist in a stirring up and awakening of the hidden depths of human feeling. All this might be equally well said of the poetry of nature. For

this poetry may, in the first place, give us a picture of the external appearances of things—and for this purpose introduce all that is quickening and enlivening in spring, all that is generous or powerful in animals, all that is beautiful and lovely in flowers and trees—all, in short, that seems to the eyes of men sublime or pleasing, whether in the heavens under which they move, or on the earth upon which they tread. The only difficulty here, is to avoid exuberance; for descriptions which are too full, even although they should be perfectly just, are distressing to us, and destroy their own effect; while solitary flowers from the fulness of nature inserted at due intervals into the web of poetry, lend a charm to the whole texture, which no other ornament can rival.—But nature also, in the second place, had her wonderful past; she also has had her times of gigantic dimension and unfettered energy, which correspond with the heroic ages in the history of man. To be convinced of this, we need only attempt to analyze the feelings with which we ourselves survey nature in her wildest forms,—the awe with which we are struck when we enter into some savage wilderness, where rocks, and hills, and woods, and waters, are all mingled together in the shapeless majesty of chaos. Or we may reflect for a moment on the tenor of all ancient traditions—they abound in the display of the great physical catastrophes of the

past. All the more unusual and terrific appearances of nature—storms, tempests, floods, and earthquakes, seem to be scattered remnants of this ancient state of things, and carry us back for a moment into the bosom of this mysterious past. These are among the most proper and the most dignified subjects of poetry, and of them accordingly the great painter of nature, Lucretius, has made frequent use. But here also, the poet must be contented with the general representation of a state of things more wild and free,—a past age of greater and more terrific operations. He must be contented with the possession of a theatre on which nature may perform her most awful tragedies. But he must not scrutinise with too close an eye the mysteries of her working. It is no part of his province to explain the scientific causes of these great phenomena. If he should begin to teach us *how* the mountains were framed—it makes no difference whether he adopts the theory of fire or of water—he has overstepped his limits; he has entered upon a topic as remote from his art, as that system of atoms, which even the unrivalled imagination of Lucretius could not represent in a manner thoroughly poetical. But there is yet a third mode in which the poet may make use of nature. Between the poet and nature, no less than between the poet and man, there is the sympathy of feeling. Not only in the song of the nightingale,

or in those melodies to which all men listen, but even in the roar of the stream, and the rushing of the forest, the poet thinks that he hears a kindred voice of sorrow or of gladness: as if spirits and feelings like our own were calling to us from afar, or seeking to sympathise and communicate with us from the utmost nearness to which their nature will allow them to approach us. It is for the purpose of listening to these tones, and of holding mysterious converse with the soul of nature, that every great poet is a lover of solitude. The question of the philosophic inquirer, whether nature be, in truth, so animated, or whether all this be not mere self-deception,—is one of no avail. It is sufficient that this feeling and this aspiration are things which exist, more or less, in the fancy and the breast, not of poets only, but of all men.—In the writings of the Greeks and Romans, we have only a few traces of this sort of poetry; they are more abundant in those of our northern ancestry, because these lived less in cities, and were, of course, more intimate with the simple forms of nature. But the truth is, that all these descriptions and feelings of nature should never, in poetry, be cut off and separated from the representation of those human beings, of whose real life they form the most beautiful ornaments. When they are isolated and set forth by themselves, the great and perfect

picture of the world, which it is the business of poetry to place before our eyes, becomes contracted in its limits ; the harmony is irremediably destroyed, and that power, which is so irresistible when all is together, becomes broken, dissipated, and ineffectual. The scientific poetry of nature which is to be found in Lucretius, is, in fact, as defective, as a mode of writing, as the doctrines which he defends are destructive as a system of philosophy ; and this is not the less true, because Lucretius himself is entitled, as a man, to much respect—as a poet, to our most enthusiastic admiration.

The great writers of Rome may be best classed and arranged according to the periods in which they were produced. The last ages of the republic were somewhat less perfect in point of language, but perhaps in every other respect richer than the age of Augustus. Cicero, considered as an orator, possesses great variety of materials, and is sufficiently skilful in his application of them to the purposes of his art ; perhaps the greatness of the events of which they treat, and the high place which Cicero himself holds in the history of the world, have conferred on these orations a character of still higher importance than that which they intrinsically deserve. It seems, at least, by no means easy to be explained, why compositions so often overflowing with verbiage should have come to be considered as stand-

ards of good writing. Even his cotemporaries used to reproach him with imitating the swell and pomp of Asiatic eloquence. But in truth, the influence which Cicero exerted on the literature and general character of the Roman people, proceeded principally from his having been the introducer of the more elevated moral philosophy of the Greeks. For those more abstruse speculations, among the labyrinths of which the spirit of the Greeks was so delighted to find a fit exercise for its subtleness and ingenuity, neither Cicero nor any other Roman writer possessed either feeling or talent. But as a friend and lover of philosophy, Cicero must ever be conspicuous. He found in it consolation in private adversity, comfort in political misfortunes, occupation in retirement, and amusement in exile. The philosophy of Plato was his principal favourite ; he considered him as the most happy specimen of an universally beautiful and cultivated intellect, and agreed with all antiquity in esteeming his works the models of perfection both in reasoning and in language. But Plato, however skilfully he had elaborated the individual parts of his philosophy, had never reduced its whole doctrines to any regular system ; in consequence of which circumstance, the later disciples of the Platonic school, through the medium of whom the whole of the Platonic doctrines became known to the Romans, had returned

in a great measure to the prejudices of scepticism. This was attended with the worst consequences in the department of Ethics, and accordingly Cicero very often, in regard to that subject, made use of the doctrines of Zeno; or where he found the austerity of these too repulsive, had recourse to those of Aristotle—who, as he professed in every thing to prefer the medium, so in morals he formed himself the medium between the severity of the Stoicks, and the laxity of the Epicureans. To this last school Cicero was uniformly hostile, and certainly not without reason. It would, indeed, be too much to believe that all those ancient philosophers, who, like Epicurus, considered pleasure as the last and highest end of human existence, really extracted from this opinion, and exemplified in their practice, all the evil which we can trace to the adoption of similar principles. But even allowing that by this pleasure, which they considered as the chief good of man, they understood not positive sensual gratification, as was the case with Aristippus—but only a painless state of intellectual enjoyment, which the best of the Epicureans, like the other philosophers of Greece, conceived was only to be found in the exercise of intellectual energies, and the society of congenial friends;—even allowing this, and laying out of the question all that grossness of abuse which has been heaped on Epicurus and his disciples,—

these philosophers were all in so far wrong, that they taught mankind to seek for their best happiness anywhere else than in a vigorous discharge of their active duties as men and as citizens. These doctrines tended at least to make men regard themselves too exclusively, as beings independent of political events; and the adoption of them at Rome, was probably extremely hurtful to the Roman constitution. Cicero, in his enmity to Epicurus and his doctrines, was guided by the feelings of a wise and reflecting patriotism. And on this account it is that his philosophical writings have been the favourite study of many active statesmen, who had not leisure to follow out long trains of profound reasoning, but were willing to diversify their moments of leisure by the perusal of works abounding in sane and rational views of human actions and principles.

In the form as well as in the style of his composition, Cicero is extremely unequal; but this is a fault with which almost all the Roman writers are more or less chargeable, and is, indeed, a natural consequence of the difficulty which they must have experienced, in reducing that which they had borrowed or learned from the Greeks to an entire harmony, with the thoughts, feelings, and expressions, which were original in themselves.

We have the first specimen of a perfect equality

of expression in Cæsar. In his writings he displays the same character which distinguished him in action: all is directed to one end, and every thing is better adapted to the attainment of that end, than any thing which could have been substituted in its room. He possesses in the utmost perfection two qualities which, next to liveliness, are the most necessary in historical compositions—clearness and simplicity. And yet how widely different are the distinctness and brevity of Cæsar, from that openhearted guilelessness, and almost Homer-like loquacity and clearness, which we admire in Herodotus. As a general arranges his troops where they can act the most efficiently and the most securely, and is careful to make use of every advantage against his enemy, even so does Cæsar arrange every word and expression with a view to its ultimate effect—and even so stedfastly does he pursue his object without being ever tempted to turn to the right hand or to the left. Among these ancient generals who, like him, have described their own achievements, Xenophon, with all the perfection of his Attic taste, occupies as a commander too insignificant a place, to be for a moment put in comparison with Cæsar. Several of Alexander's generals, and Hannibal himself, wrote accounts of the remarkable campaigns in which they had been engaged, but unfortunately their compositions have

entirely perished. The Roman, even as a writer, when we compare him with those who in similar situations have made similar attempts, is still Cæsar—the unrivalled and the unconquered.

In the drawing of characters, and indeed, in general as a historical painter, Sallust has few equals; but he is neither so clear nor so consistent a writer, nor endued with so delicate a sense of propriety, as Cæsar. Here and there we perpetually meet with something forced in his style, and detect the elaborate artifice of a practiced writer. Even in history—a form of writing which was more easily than any other, transplanted to Rome from the Greek republics where it had its origin—the close imitation of any individual model never failed to produce disagreeable consequences; and of this we have a striking example in Sallust, whose strict imitation of Thucydides has gone far to lessen the effect of his own great original genius.

In this first flourishing age of Roman authors, it is easy to perceive of what advantage it is to the literature of any nation, that men of the most elevated rank should take a part in it, and co-operate with their inferiors in the forwarding of its development. Their influence insensibly extends itself to every department of literature; and their countrymen learn to treat of every thing, and to judge of every thing, as if they were all animated with

the dignified spirit of nobility. It is to this circumstance that the Roman literature is indebted, for a great part of its characteristic *greatness* of thought and expression.—As after the death of Brutus a new order of things commenced in the political world, the world of letters experienced a corresponding revolution. The literature of the age of Augustus is distinguished by a tone of spirit entirely its own. The free voice of eloquence was stopped; and the consequence was, that men returned again with redoubled affection to poetry, which had been mute, in a great measure, during the tempestuous periods of the civil wars. Nothing, it was now supposed, could so well celebrate and adorn the restoration of peace, and the happy reign of Octavius, as the appearance of great national poets, who might supply the chief defect in the literature of their country, and create a body of classical works, in which the ancient Roman traditions might be handed down to posterity. With a view to this, not Virgil alone, but also Propertius and Horace, were flattered, courted, and enriched, in a manner to which the literary men of all other ages and countries have been strangers, by the liberal courtiers of Augustus. Propertius, by the richness of his style, seems to have been well qualified for epic poetry; but he would not sacrifice for fame the freedom of his own inclinations; he lived only

for himself and those feelings of friendship and unfortunate love, which filled all his soul, and which animate all his writings with a tenderness unequalled in any other author of his country. Horace perhaps exceeds all the Roman writers who have come down to us, in true feeling for heroic greatness. He was a patriot who locked up within his own breast his sorrow for the subversion of the commonwealth ; and who had recourse to all manner of pleasures, perhaps even to poetry itself, with a view to dissipate the grief with which he was oppressed. On every occasion we can see the inspiring flame of patriotism and freedom breaking through that mist of levity, in which his poetry is involved. He could not indeed have framed any great poem out of the early history or traditions of his country, without perpetually betraying feelings which were no longer in season, and could not have been listened to without a crime. He constrained his inclinations, and endeavoured to write like a royalist,—but, in spite of himself, he is still manifestly a republican and a Roman.

The calm, industrious, and feeling Virgil was, by his love for nature and for a country life, peculiarly qualified to be the national poet of the Romans. The old Roman, or in general, indeed, the old Italian mode of life, was entirely agricultural and rural, while the Greeks, on the other hand, were

chiefly, and that from their earliest days, a traffick-ing, sea-faring, and commercial people. Even the most illustrious and noble of the citizens of Rome, lived, in the best days of the republic, entirely according to the old customs of their countrymen; and even in the later periods, notwithstanding the great corruption of the metropolis itself, that soundness and strength of moral feeling, and that purity of manners, which belong to an agricultural and rural nation, were far from being entirely banished out of the surrounding districts of Italy. To dwell on rural enjoyments, and make use of simple feelings, therefore, was quite necessary for one who aspired to be the poet not of the metropolis, but of the nation. Virgil's love for nature and a country life is evident, indeed, in the first work of his youth, the Eclogues; but he has displayed it with the richest eloquence in the most perfect of all his works—the Georgics. If he had only paid due honour to this species of poetry, in itself so masterly, so well adapted for Rome (restored as she was to peace after a succession of wars and revolutions), and in truth so kindred to the general feelings and propensities of all Italians,—and refrained from embodying it in the foreign and artificial form of the Alexandrian didactic;—if he had only given to agriculture and rural feelings as prominent a place in his great work, as they really

occupied in the ancient ages of his country, and so presented us with one comprehensive and perfect picture of the old Italian life—the heroic traditions, which it was his chief purpose to revive, would have then obtained a faster hold on our feelings, and a closer connection with the thoughts of all men and all ages,—and in short would have been presented to us with a concentrated spirit and a life, which the plan he has adopted was the most infallible way to dissipate or extinguish. The whole scope of his heroic poem would then have been enlarged, and the connection of its parts would have become infinitely less artificial. In the very stiff arrangement which he has adopted, the latter part of his poem, which is exclusively dedicated to Italian subjects, appears to infinite disadvantage when compared with the first, in which he has so happily connected the origin of the Romans with the heroic tales of the Trojan period, and made such liberal use of all the rich inventions of the old poets of the Greeks. Notwithstanding all these defects, however, the *Aeneid*, although Virgil himself despised and even wished to destroy it, has always kept its place as the peculiar national poem of the Romans. Were we to judge merely by the high flow of inspiration, and the unlaboured felicity of inborn talent, we might perhaps consider Lucretius, or even Ovid, as a greater poetical genius

than Virgil; what secures to him the preference, is that national feeling which forms not the occasional charm, but the perpetual inspiration of his poetry. Still the *Aeneid* can never be looked upon as a perfect poem. The same struggle between borrowed art and native strength, which may be remarked in almost all Roman poets, is evident in Virgil; and in him, not less than in the others, a consequent want of harmony in materials, and even in language, may not unfrequently be observed.

But if Virgil be not exempt from this fault, it is undoubtedly far more apparent in Horace and the other lyrical poets. The epic poetry of different nations has always many points of coincidence; although it is evident enough that the rigid imitation of Homer has weakened and confined the genius of Virgil; and drawn both him and many more recent poets into the most glaring errors. But, laying the form of composition altogether out of the question, the heroic legends of one people can in general be pretty easily ingrafted on those of another. In the early traditions of nations the most remote from each other, we find invariably a thousand circumstances wherein the resemblance is too striking to escape the most superficial observer. I shall not on the present occasion pretend to decide, whether this resemblance be merely the result of a necessary similarity in the si-

tuation of all nations in the infant periods of society ; or whether it be not so remarkable in many circumstances—particularly in the marvellous fictions and not very obvious symbols which have so generally been adopted, as to warrant the conclusion, that the coincidence could only have proceeded from the common origin of nations apparently the most unconnected. In serious dramatic poetry, the knowledge of what degrees of perfection have been attained by other nations, is of great use ; for it supplies us with specimens of what may be attained, and with a standard by which we may judge of the success of our own attempts. Still however the mere form of a foreign drama should never be imitated ; the stage which aspires to exert an universal influence, must assume a character conformable to the manners, education, temper, and modes of thinking, which prevail among the nation who are to survey its exhibitions. The drama is always powerful exactly in proportion as it is peculiar.

But in no species of composition is imitation so hurtful and despicable as in lyrical poetry. The whole charm and excellence of this sort of writing consists, in its being the free emanation of individual feelings. The whole beauty of it vanishes the moment we detect a single trace of imitation ; it is only tolerable because it is natural, and the appearance of art renders it immediately disgust-

ing. But in the writings of Roman lyrical poets, there is nothing more common, than to be able to point out, with the utmost precision, the line where imitation of some Greek original ends, and the poet begins to speak from his own feelings. It is perhaps the best proof of the power of Horace's genius, that in spite of this defect, which is as common in his writings as in any others, he is still of all Roman poets the one who commands the greatest share of our sympathy, and stirs up our enthusiasm with the most potent magic.—His greatness is ever most conspicuous where he speaks altogether as a Roman—when he dwells upon the sublime magnanimity of antiquity, on the solitary grandeur of the exiled Regulus, or on those other heroes who, in his own phrase, “were prodigal of their great souls” in the service of their country.

In satire, the only species of writing which can be said to have been an invention of the Romans, Horace is equally illustrious. This sort of writing, which belongs indeed to the common class of ludicrous lyrical poetry, but which received at Rome the rank and characteristics of a separate species of composition, and gave rise to a new and less stately form of the heroic measure, is exclusively Roman, not in these respects only, but also in the spirit with which it is animated, and the whole

subjects of which it treats. It is entirely confined to the capital itself, the social habits and customs, amusements, spectacles, and assemblies of its inhabitants; but perhaps its most favourite topic is the corruption of Roman manners, which were now daily approaching to the last stage of possible viciousness;—this great city having become not only the seat of universal government and wealth, but also the centre-point of attraction to the whole family of adventurers,—the magnet which was perpetually drawing within its circle the collected filth and worthlessness of the whole world. The only perfect picture which poetry can set before us of common life, is in the drama: individual traits or scenes, however masterly, can never satisfy us. The Roman satire therefore in the hands of such a writer as Horace, is merely a substitute for that comedy which the Roman people ought to have possessed.—With regard to the satires of Juvenal, their chief interest depends on the vehement expression of scorn and indignation excited by the contemplation of the execrable vices: the spirit in which they are conceived may be morally sublime, but can scarcely receive the name of poetical.

In their prose writings, the Romans attained much higher eminence than in their poetry. Livy may be said to be perfect so far as language is con-

cerned; for in him we have a faultless specimen of that rhetorical species of history which was peculiar to the ancients.

The first half of the long reign of Augustus, commonly receives the credit of having produced a number of great geniuses, whose talents, it is very true, were first perfectly developed during that period, but who had in fact been, almost all of them, born in the last years of the republic; who had seen with their own eyes the greatness of their country, and been animated in their youth with the breath of freedom. The younger generation who were born, or who at the least grew up to manhood, after the commencement of the monarchy, were altogether different. In the last years of Augustus we can already perceive the symptoms of declining taste—in Ovid particularly, who is overrun with an unhealthy superfluity of fancy, and a sentimental effeminacy of expression.

How soon even history, in which the Romans were most successful, yielded to the depressing influence of the following Cæsars, and became corrupted even as an art, may be easily seen in the timid style of Velleius,—to say nothing of the flattering meanness with which that writer often disguises the true import of the incidents which he narrates. The proper head and founder of a new and most artificial taste in writing, which soon afterwards became

predominant, was Seneca the philosopher. The more despotic the government became, the more were those, whose spirits were still unsatisfied, inclined to throw themselves into the arms of Stoicism; the principles of that philosophy were agreeable to the pride and freedom of strong minds, exactly in proportion as every thing noble and free was banished from the principles and practice of the tyrants under which they lived. An unnatural pomp, and extravagance even of expression, has been, in more instances than this, produced by the political and social depression of a nation. But Lucan furnishes perhaps the most striking example of this seemingly strange consequence of despotism; in him we find the most outrageously republican feelings making their chosen abode in the breast of a wealthy and luxurious courtier of Nero. It excites surprise and even disgust to observe how he stoops to flatter that detestable tyrant, in expressions, the meanness of which amounts to a crime; and then, in the next page, exalts Cato above the gods themselves, and speaks of all the enemies of the first Cæsar with an admiration that approaches to idolatry. The Roman poetry, as if unwilling altogether to deny its most ancient though nearly forgotten destination, came back, in the hands of Lucan, to the celebration of the heroes of Roman history. There can be no doubt that a great his-

torical event may in itself be very well fitted to form the subject of an heroic poem; how near or how distant this event may be in a chronological point of view, is I think a matter of little consequence; the nature, not the date of the incidents, should be principally considered. The historical event which is to form the subject of an epic poem should be one wherein feeling and audacity seem to have exerted a more predominant influence than reasoning and calculation—one, in short, which affords room for the play of fancy. The life and achievements of Alexander the Great, for instance, the fall of Darius, and the expedition to India, might, I have no doubt, furnish an excellent epic subject in the hands of a poet capable of doing justice to such a theme. The civil war between Cæsar and Pompey, on the other hand,—a contest, strictly speaking, not of men or heroes, but of parties and political systems, has formed the ground-work of several excellent tragedies in modern times; but I am at a loss to conceive the possibility of its ever being formed into a fit subject of epic poetry by the art or the genius of any writer. The picture of the taste of this period is completed by the obscure Persius, and the forced style of the elder Pliny. This last author may furnish us with some idea of the extent to which the Romans might have enlarged the field of human knowledge, had they made

use of the facilities which were placed within their reach by the political position of their country, and made it their business to collect together the natural curiosities of the different regions to which their influence extended.

Better times however succeeded to these ; the civilised world was destined to be governed for a season, by a genuine Roman of the ancient school sitting on the throne of Augustus. As Trajan was the last of the Cæsars who thought like a Roman, and rivalled the old Roman greatness both in his principles and his achievements,—so, very shortly before his reign, the kindred genius of Tacitus concluded the series of great authors whom Rome was destined to produce. This writer had received his education during the reigns of Vespasian and Titus, times which appeared happy because they had been preceded by the atrocities of Nero ; he had learned to meditate and to be silent under Domitian, and under Nerva he saw the beginning of that more fortunate period which was to appear in the fulness of its glory under the blessed reign of Trajan.

The profound thoughtfulness of his spirit, and the corresponding though perhaps yet more peculiar depth of his expressions, appear always the more imitable, the more attempts are made at their imitation. Even in style he may be said to be perfect,

although the language of his day neither was, nor could be, any longer the same with that of the time of the great Cæsar or of Livy. In these three authors, according to my apprehension, the language of Rome is displayed in its utmost purity and perfection: in Cæsar it appears in unadorned simplicity and greatness; in Livy it wears all the splendour and ornament of elaborate rhetoric, but is still free from exaggeration, beautiful and noble in its construction; in Tacitus, although he is very far from either the chaste simplicity of the one, or the polished elegance of the other of these writers, it assumes an appearance of depth, power, and energy, to which it had as yet been a stranger. It would seem as if the memory had been even more powerful than the presence of Roman greatness, and stamped a character of loftiness on the historian of despotic cruelty, to which none of those who celebrated liberty and victory could attain.

LECTURE IV.

SHORT DURATION OF THE ROMAN LITERATURE—NEW EPOCH UNDER HADRIAN—INFLUENCE OF THE OPINIONS OF THE ORIENTALS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE WEST—MOSAIC WRITINGS, POETRY OF THE HEBREWS—RELIGION OF THE PERSIANS—MONUMENTS OF THE INDIANS—MODES OF INTERMENT AMONG THE ANCIENT NATIONS.

I HAVE already said that literature and philosophy were, at the best, plants foreign to the soil of Rome, and now I imagine all will be inclined to join in my opinion who compare either the number of great Roman writers with that of great Greek writers, or the period during which art and literature flourished in Rome, with the time during which Greece was so eminently distinguished for her attainments in both.

Rome possessed many translators from the Greek, as well as some poets and original writers of her own, from the time when the Scipios began to patronise Greek literature and rhetoric; when Cato began to inquire into the history, antiquities, and lan-

guage of the Roman people, with a view to counteract the influence of the Greek taste introduced, by the Scipios,—and when Ennius, in part at least, began to apply the art and poetical measures of the Greeks to Roman subjects, and to lay the foundation of a Roman school of poetry. But to complete the idea of a flourishing literature we require something more than a few individual inquiries and works—and these too, as in the present case, sometimes not a little at variance with each other; we look for a certain connection and unity among all the parts of literature, a determinate and regular fixing of language, particularly of prose—in short we expect to see the effects of general education, and a wide spread cultivation of all those branches of knowledge which regard either language, or rhetoric, or even the higher departments of philosophy. The literature of Rome can scarcely be said to have existed till the time of Cicero, who had a grater share in its formation than any other individual, and may indeed almost be said to have created the peculiar character by which it was at all times distinguished. Before his time the whole education of his country, whether with a view to eloquence, or in general to polite letters, was conducted on Greek principles, after Greek models, and in the Greek language. He first demonstrated the possibility of carrying on an ex-

tensive and scientific education in the Roman language, by framing and fashioning its constructions so as to embrace, in the happiest manner, the subjects of philosophy, and in particular the theory of rhetoric. The Roman language was not only enlarged, it was also fixed and settled by the writings of Cicero. To this however many illustrious writers contributed very greatly, about the same period, above all Cæsar and Varro, by their grammatical writings. Next to Cicero, these had certainly the greatest part in the formation of the proper literature of Rome; Cæsar by the improvement which Roman speakers derived from the example of his eloquence in the senate, but still more, by the labour which he bestowed on giving to the language of which he was so perfectly master, a scientific shape and consistency, and so enabling it to effect its purposes with greater power and certainty in time to come;—Varro, scarcely less than Cæsar, by his extensive erudition and the formation of his great library, as well as by his profound investigations of antiquities and language. The united excellencies of these three authors entitle the age in which they lived to be considered as the most important epoch of Roman literature.—I have already endeavoured to give a very short sketch of the most remarkable Roman writers down to the time of Trajan. The panegyric of that prince by the younger Pliný may

be considered as the last exertion of the flourishing literature of Rome. His virtues were well deserving of such a celebration, but Roman eloquence after this successful attempt soon sank into a state of utter decline. The imbecility of the imitators of Pliny was as remarkable, as the inferiority of the despicable tyrants whom they panegyrised, to the manly virtues of Trajan.

The classical period of the Roman literature, then, reckoning from the consulate of Cicero till the death of Trajan, included no more than one hundred and eighty years. Within the same period also the science of jurisprudence, the only original intellectual possession of great value to which the Romans can lay undisputed claim, received its first developement, and began to assume the appearance of a science. Cicero and Cæsar were both impressed with a sense of the necessity which even in their time existed for collecting into a complete body, and arranging in a perspicuous manner, the immense and discouraging masses of Roman statutes: under Augustus, and in the reigns immediately following his, both departments of jurisprudence—that of strict law on the one hand, and that of equity on the other,—began to be valued according to their merits, and to have the limits of their respective application ascertained. It was reserved for Hadrian, by the publication of a com-

plete code (the *perpetual edict* as it was called) to accomplish that which had been the object of wish rather than of hope both to Cicero and Cæsar.

With Hadrian there commences a period altogether new, not only in the principles of government, but also in the general mode of thinking adopted by the Roman people. The Greek language and literature began daily to recover the attention which was due to them, to receive ample atonement for the neglect under which they had for sometime lain, and to secure for themselves an ever increasing intellectual dominion over the whole civilised world—united as that now was in a political point of view under the government of the Roman Cæsars.

While the Roman writers of any note were becoming every day fewer after the time of Trajan, and while of these even the best were at all times unworthy of being compared for a moment with those of the ages which preceded them, the fate of Grecian letters exhibited an exactly opposite appearance. The literature and philosophy of Greece seemed, about the very period when these were utterly extinguished among the Romans, to have received a new life, and an accession of universal intellectual activity. There grew up forthwith a rich after-crop of Grecian genius, not altogether unworthy, either with regard to its substance or its appearance, of the richer harvest that had gone be-

fore it,—at all events incomparably superior to any thing which had been produced for some ages immediately preceding. In poetry, it is true, it does not appear that any thing either very new or very excellent sprung up among them; but to atone for this, philosophy and rhetoric (things which in the old Attic period were regarded as altogether separate and irreconcileable) began now to be studied with unprecedented ardour, and blended together into the most complete co-operation. The old Socratic method of treating philosophical subjects (a method of which we have the best specimens in the dialogues of Plato) could now no longer be adopted; the manners and mode of life which that method took for granted had entirely passed away, and that simple form of philosophising was altogether unsuitable for those which had succeeded them. The scientific and rigid accuracy of Aristotle was at all times adapted only for a few. The consequence was that there arose a more rhetorical manner of treating scientific subjects, which continued in fashion from the reign of Hadrian and the two Antonines, down to the Emperor Julian, and which has been adopted even in these modern times by a great many writers of distinguished eminence. And here I may remark in passing, that the Greeks displayed, indeed, at some particular periods, the highest reach and inventiveness of poetical genius, —

but that rhetoric was, beyond all question, the art most peculiarly their own. It was born with them, and remained even truly and indisputably theirs from the earliest times till the latest; if now and then it seemed as if it had deserted them, it was only to spring up again under some other form, and to cling to them yet more fervently than before.

Among the great crowd of writers belonging to this latter period of ancient Greek literature, who are in general useful only as sources of historical information, or as supplying in some measure the place of those older and better works out of which they derived their materials, we find nevertheless some few who possess a value more universal, and more their own. Of these the first is Plutarch, whose *Lives*, with all their defects in writing as well as in thought, have brought down to the modern world a true treasure of moral wisdom, which is even at the present day altogether invaluable. His style is overladen and not unfrequently corrupt. Among the overflowing fulness of remarks with which he has garnished the lives of his heroes, we must be careful to make our selection; there are among them not a few which are altogether unsuitable and childish. On the whole, however, Plutarch shews himself everywhere to have been a man of the most praiseworthy intentions, and one who had, so far at least as morals are concerned, made

himself master of the whole riches of the flourishing and classical ages of Greece, was familiar with all the disputes, and penetrated with all the most dignified conceptions of the old sages of his country. In Lucian, again, we find the clearest evidence that the true elegance of Greek style, and the spirit of the Attic wit, had not yet altogether passed away. There are few authors of any age or country who can be put in the same rank with Lucian as writers of satirical and miscellaneous philosophy. His highest value however consists without doubt in his pictures of manners. Even in history—Arrian (who has been commonly called the best historian of Alexander) deserves, on account of his beautiful and unaffected style, to be placed near Xenophon. And Marcus Aurelius occupies so great and glorious a place in the history of the human kind, that the meditations of this last of the great and virtuous of Roman sovereigns, written as they are in the Greek language, and exhibiting the most perfect acquaintance with the philosophy of the Stoicks, must always be sought after with great curiosity, and dwelt upon with the profoundest interest, by every lover of virtue, as well as of letters.

The history of the unworthy successors of Marcus Aurelius is written by Herodian in a style which we could scarcely have looked for at the period in which he lived.

Antoninus Pius was the first who introduced into the Roman empire the Greek philosophers of different sects as instruments of education, and enlisted, so to speak, that important body of men in the service of the state. Philosophy, particularly that of the Stoicks, was now called in to prop up if possible, or at least to supply the place of that popular belief which was hurrying irresistibly to its ruin. How much the belief in the old gods had become sunk and weakened, how widely doubt, freethinking, and infidelity, had now become spread abroad in the Roman world, we can gather without difficulty from Lucian. But the true type of that universal fermentation of opinions, and restless activity of inquiry which distinguished this age, must be sought for in the most undisguised of all ancient sceptics—Sextus Empiricus. We may also learn from Lucian how prevalent at the same period was the propensity to superstition,—by what rapid strides a sort of philosophical credulity began to take the place of the old poetical credulity of the popular creed; how a belief in astrology, and a leaning to the magical sciences, were fostered by the ruling influence of secret societies and brotherhoods, till at last they were openly professed in the writings as well as oral communications of the philosophic teachers of the day. The influence of Oriental opinions and principles was, indeed, becoming every

day more powerful, and this introduced not only a more near acquaintance with the old and pure fountains of truth, but also a stream of wilder superstitions than could have sprung out of the cold soil of the west. We can trace this tendency to Orientalism even in the architecture of the age of Hadrian, which was remarkable for its recurrence to an almost Egyptian massiness. Plutarch, although classed among the followers of Plato, exhibits the Platonic philosophy under an aspect altogether new; when she had begun to embrace within her range all the rules of those original Egyptian doctrines which were at that time ascribed to Pythagoras, and to approximate more and more nearly to all the relics of that old Oriental wisdom, from which Plato himself had derived the most sublime of his conceptions.

This new Platonic philosophy very soon came to be the only one in vogue; the other sects, such as the Sceptical, the Epicurean, and even the Stoical, ceased to preserve their distinct and individual appearance. Yet not a few of the peculiar opinions of the Stoicks entered into the composition of this inclusive philosophy of the later Greeks, which derived from the chief of its component parts the name of New-Platonic. It was this philosophy which for a long time contended against Christianity with the most violent exertions of intellectual strength, which had hopes in the days of the Em-

peror Julian of acquiring an entire victory, of preserving unbroken the old popular creed, and infusing into it the elements of a new life, by interpreting its allegories and spiritualising its personifications.

This contest between Christianity and the heathenish philosophy—between the old polytheism and the new belief, a poetical mythology and a religion of morality,—is the most remarkable intellectual contest which has ever been exhibited and determined among the human race. It forms not only the wall of partition between the two worlds—the ages of antiquity which terminated in it, and these of modern times which sprung out of it; in the history of all culture it is the keystone upon which every thing hangs; in the history of the developement of the human intellect it is the central point from which all illumination must be derived. To set before you this great contest with that clearness at which a complete history of literature ought to aim, to point out its influence not only in language and art but also on the fate of nations and the general destiny of man, would require limits which are far beyond my reach. To give any idea of it which can be at all satisfactory, it is necessary that I should begin with some inquiries into the peculiar spirit of the Greek philosophy; that I should point out the place which the Christian doctrines

and scriptures occupy in the history of the human mind; and that I should briefly explain the nature of those other relics of Oriental wisdom, which are in part in harmony with the doctrines of Moses and of Christ, and were in part the most ancient fountains from which the sublime visions of the Greek sages were derived.

Concerning those minor results of this contest which may be termed the ornamental, concerning the relative influence of the two religions on the beautiful fictions of poetry and the progress of the imitative arts, I shall at present say nothing. Many opportunities will occur in the sequel, not indeed of doing justice to these topics, but at least of apologising for the deficiency both of my plan and my execution. For the present I must confine myself altogether to one topic, to which by an irresistible and inborn curiosity we are at all times compelled to devote our first inquiries, which we never cease to consider as the great hinge on which the whole history and revolutions of the human intellect depend.

Plato and Aristotle were the two greatest masters,—it may even be said that they alone mark on every side the limits, of the knowledge of the Greeks. Plato treated of philosophy altogether as an art, Aristotle as a science. In the first we see the thinking faculties in the calm state of contempla-

tion, reposing with awful admiration on the spectacle of divine perfection. But Aristotle considers intellect as something perpetually at work, and delights to trace its unceasing operations not only as the moving power of human thought and being, but also as the secret principle of the activity of nature, and the master-spring of all her most varied demonstrations. Plato is the model of Greek art; Aristotle furnishes the best idea of Grecian science.

When Plato enters the lists against the Sophists, and pursues them into the mazes of their errors, he displays great acuteness and nicety of penetration; but with all his Attic taste, and all his fitness of understanding, with all the clearness and all the skilful adaptation of his language, he becomes not unfrequently dark and sophistical, like those against whom he strives. But the leading principle of his philosophy is at all times clear and perceptible. From an original and infinitely more lofty and intellectual state of existence, there remains to man (according to the philosophy of Plato), a dark remembrance of divinity and perfection. This inborn and implanted recollection of the godlike, remains ever dark and mysterious; for man is surrounded by the sensible world which, being in itself changeable and imperfect, encircles him with images of imperfection, changeableness,

corruption, and error, and thus casts perpetual obscurity over that light which is within him. Wherever in the sensible and natural world he perceives any thing which bears a resemblance to the Godhead, which can serve as a symbol of the highest perfection,—the old recollections of his soul are awakened and refreshed. The love of the beautiful fills and animates the soul of the beholder with an awe and reverence which belong not to the beautiful itself—at least not to any sensible manifestation of it—but to that unseen original of which material beauty is the type. From this admiration, this new awakened recollection, and this instantaneous inspiration, spring all higher knowledge and truth. These are not the product of cold, leisurely, and voluntary reflection, but occupy at once a station far superior to what either thought, or art, or speculation can attain; and enter into our inmost souls with the power and presence of a gift from the divinity.

Plato therefore considers all knowledge of the Godhead and divine things as only to be derived from higher and supernatural sources; and this is the distinguishing characteristic of all his philosophy. The dialectical part of his works is only the *negative*, in which he combats and overthrows error with great art, or, with art yet greater and yet more inimitable, leads us step by step towards

the fountain head of truth. But where it is his purpose to reveal this itself—that is in the *positive* part of his works—he expresses his meaning altogether after the fashion of his Oriental masters, in emblems, and fables, and poetical mysteries; ever true to his belief in supernatural means of knowledge, and acting in all things as if he were really the organ of some inspiring and awful revelation. It is not to be denied that his philosophy is essentially incomplete, and that he himself seems never to have attained perfect clearness and precision in his conceptions. This is sufficiently evident from the ill-defined limits assigned in all his writings to *reason* on the one hand, and *love* or *inspiration* on the other. When he speaks of the love of the beautiful and of divine inspiration,—when he expressly acknowledges that these are the only conductors to all sublimer truths, and asserts that they elevate us far beyond the cold regions of human reason and reflection, and reveal to us something far more lofty than these could ever reach,—we are willing to believe that Plato had conceptions at once lively and feeling of God and his perfection. But on the other hand, when he exerts only his dialectic art, he often sinks into the common errors of his brethren, and seems as if he acknowledged no higher idea of perfection than is to be found in that of an unchangeable and unoccupied unity

of Reason.—It is true that in all this he was much limited and fettered by the influence and opinions of the older philosophers. In general, however, his philosophy remained at all times as imperfect as he left it—attributing all knowledge of divine truth to vague individual recollections, and expressing it only in dark hints and forebodings—having in short no higher merit, than that of ingrafting on the old Greek philosophy, and adorning with all the beauty of Attic art, and all the shrewdness of Socratic ethics, some obscure recollections of the old Eastern wisdom, and some mysterious presentiments of the doctrines of Christianity.

The connection of Plato with Socrates in some degree indeed kept both him and his immediate followers in Athens free from falling into the extreme of mysticism and enthusiasm. His disciples were indeed sensible in some measure of the imperfection of his system, but this discovery only tended to drive them backward to the old refuges of doubt and scepticism. That leaning to mysticism, however, which was so conspicuous in his later followers, was, in fact, inherent in the mode and substance of their master's principles. It is almost impossible that any one should receive the doctrine of a supernatural source of knowledge in the undefined manner in which he has shadowed it out—as a dark recollection—a mysterious inspiration—a lofty in-

tercourse with the heavens—without falling into the same errors for which the New-Platonists are remarkable. To put an end to this it was absolutely necessary that something altogether different and much more steadfast should appear—something which might elevate wavering and uncertain forebodings of the truth to the rank of consistent rules of thinking, and elicit from a world of unsatisfying dreams, a sane and rational belief, worthy of forming a rule and standard for the whole life of man.

When the later followers of Plato made a systematic attempt to enlarge his imperfect philosophy by a more liberal adoption of Oriental opinions, the mode in which they conducted their endeavour was indeed often little in unison with the Attic taste and Socratic spirit of Plato himself. But they did nothing which was really at variance with the essence of his philosophy, and the recognised principle of an higher source of knowledge. Upon that principle, indeed, all the doctrines and relics of Oriental wisdom were more or less dependent.

The great principle of Aristotle is by no means so easy to be discovered as that of Plato; and the reason of this must be sought for in his obscurity, a thing which has been complained of from the oldest times, and by his most fervent admirers.

Yet the result of every man's study of the spirit of his philosophy must, I apprehend, be very nearly the same, and must be sufficiently consistent with this universally acknowledged and lamented obscurity. How then happens it that this mighty spirit, this perfect master both of thought and of language, this most acute judge and perspicuous reasoner in regard to all which lies within the limit of experience—this great and inventive genius who may be said to have discovered the proper application of the instrument, thought—who first reduced reasoning to principles and reflection to a system—how comes it that he should answer those most essential and important questions, which man never ceases to propose,—concerning the destiny and origin of the human race,—concerning God, and the universe—in a manner so dark, unintelligible, and unsatisfactory? The cause of this was his rejection of all other sources of knowledge excepting only reason and experience. The higher source of knowledge by Plato appeared to him unsatisfying and unscientific. To reconcile reason and experience he had recourse to many intermediate contrivances. So fond indeed was he of the intermediate, that he defines virtue itself the middle point between two extremes, and explains every moral evil as being either too much or too little. In his scientific discourses concerning the external world, that

he may avoid that ancient difficulty which arises out of the unchangeableness of eternal nature, and the perpetual variation in the visible creation, he betakes himself to a similar solution. He admits that the first cause, the godlike principle of motion, is indeed in itself immoveable, and that in our sublunary world every thing is subject to the laws of perpetual variety and mutation; but he thinks he has found an explanation of all our difficulties when he has discovered that between those two states of things there exists yet another world—the world of stars—wherein there is to be seen neither the perfect unmovedness of divinity, nor the perpetual changeableness of earthly things, but something intermediate—a motion which is immutable, and eternal revolutions regulated by the most unvarying laws. In like manner, to fill up the great void between the source of reason, he introduces the idea of a passive and suffering understanding, an objective common sense between them both. All this may be deserving of much admiration so far as the invention and acuteness alone of the philosopher are to be taken into consideration, even although we should find them upon the whole productive of little satisfaction. Nay this method of philosophising might be productive of the best consequences when applied to any separate object which it is wished thoroughly to examine and scrutinize.

finise exactly as it stands. But with regard to those high questions to which I have above alluded, questions which it is impossible for human beings at any time to pass over as uninteresting, whose object is to clear up those mysteries which hang over the destination of man, the nature of God and the government of the world—with regard to all these, it is not in the power either of experience or of reason to afford any satisfactory reply. The experience of the senses leads only to denial and unbelief; the reason is soon bewildered in itself, and can yield no better answer than a set of unintelligible formulas, to questions which are at once simple, unavoidable, and impressive. The philosophy of Aristotle partakes of both these defects, and is ever hesitating in the midst between baseless idealism and the system of experience, if we consider the greater part of his works and inquiries, particularly those in which he treats of the natural sciences and of morals, it appears as if the latter were preponderant; and Aristotle takes his station at the head of all the empirical philosophers of antiquity, not only on account of the extent of his knowledge, but also on account of the skilfulness of his inquiries and admirable principles of investigation which he has laid down. But, on the other hand, the fundamental idea of all his higher philosophy and metaphysics is, without doubt,

that of a self-directing activity or *entelechia*.—If however we cannot find in his works any true and consistent exposition of the system of the universe, but only separate inquiries concerning its individual parts,—if, when we expect a definition of the universe or the first cause, we are always sure to be put off with some empty formula or bare abstraction; we must not forget that these are the faults not of Aristotle's intellect, but of the system which he adopted. These are errors into which all philosophers both ancient and modern have fallen who pretended to explain every thing by human reason or experience, and would admit of no higher fountain of knowledge, no divine revelation, or tradition of the truth.

Those who have in philosophy followed the path of Aristotle, or one very similar to his, are indeed innumerable. It is true that he had in the times of antiquity comparatively few professed followers; it is also true that there was a time in which, although a whole legion of disciples in all the schools; both of the east and the west, acknowledged his authority, his true spirit remained a secret to all his admirers. Since the period it has become the fashion to lay to the blame of this great philosopher not a few of the errors of his blundering disciples, and to vilify and underrate the stagyrite with the same sort of prejudiced ignorance which formerly

led men to deify and adore him. But in every age, and even down to our own times, there have been many who, without being themselves conscious of it, have been stedfast adherents of Aristotle——many of these altogether, or very nearly so, unacquainted with his writings, and not a few who have the appearance of being his most deadly enemies and opponents. I allude to those, on the one hand, who, pursuing the course of deep self-consideration, have been betrayed into the same error of unintelligible idealism; and, on the other, to all those who, from Locke downwards, acknowledge even in philosophy no source of knowledge but experience. These last, whenever they attempt scientific experiment, find themselves incapable of making any progress without some abstract ideas, and so fall into the same errors of formality which are the chief defects of Aristotle.

These two great spirits, then, Plato and Aristotle, may be said to have given in some measure a shape and form to the whole range of human thought. They were indeed but ill appreciated by their contemporaries, but perhaps even for that reason their influence has been greater in the after world, of whose spirit they had for many ages the almost exclusive direction not only in all matters of abstract science, but also in every thing that relates to the philosophy of human life. Even now, after the

human intellect has become two thousand years older, and been extended and enriched by so many discoveries—while the number of books which Plato could have read appears to us as nothing, surrounded as we are by immense libraries of ancient erudition and modern acuteness—while we look down upon the opinions of Aristotle concerning the system of the world as altogether nugatory and childish—while we are in the possession of a religion which has taught us more lofty conceptions of God and more profound knowledge of ourselves—it is strange enough that, even in the present day, these two master spirits still maintain their ground of pre-eminence, and stand out as the great landmarks of intellect. All philosophy is either Peripateticism or Platonism, or an attempt, more or less successful, to reconcile them. He that confesses any higher tradition of truth, or fountain of knowledge, is without all question pursuing the footsteps of Plato; and this he may do without any sort of servility, for the system of Plato is by no means one of confinement and narrowness, but a liberal and Socratic guide to all manner of investigations and researches. For those on the other hand who adopt the course of reason and experience, it will always be impossible to go much farther than Aristotle has gone. In his own way and his own department he is great and unrivalled. The

world can exhibit few spirits which so comprehended the whole experience of their age, and ~~required~~ ^{ac} required such an intellectual supremacy over it as his. He handles reason as an instrument, with a dexterity of which I know no other example.

Out of these two elements was the later philosophy of the Greeks compounded : it was excellent in art, and comprehensive in science, but for the truth it was at the best unsatisfactory. In it the spirit of Plato was predominant, and the utmost which was aimed at was to supply his want of scientific form from Aristotle, and his more serious defect of conception from the different opinions and traditions of the Orientals.

The Greek philosophy was at all times very different from the Oriental ; it was more directed to the external appearances of life, to the beautiful, and to the forms of art. Yet, in the midst of a self-satisfaction and national vanity, which we easily pardon to this remarkable people, we find that their more profound inquirers, both in the earlier and later periods of their history, were not without a high reverence for the depth and sublimity of the Eastern wisdom. The chief object of their consideration in these matters was Egypt, from which they at all times confessed that their own peculiar theology and traditions were derived. In the remoter back ground of their intellectual world lay

India. The belief of the Hebrews remained always infinitely more foreign to them, and their mode of thinking was equally remote from having any connection with the religion of the Persians. With the Egyptians, the Phœnicians, and the inhabitants of Asia Minor, on the contrary, they were connected by the tie of one common religion, which, with many points of difference in the detail, was in fact, in all matters of serious principle and import, radically and essentially the same. The whole of the other known nations of antiquity were indeed separated from the Hebrews, and in part also from the Persians, by the difference of their religions. As the Mosaic writings were rendered into Greek in the time of the great Ptolemy Philadelphus, it is possible, indeed, that many critics before Longinus felt and admired their sublimity—endeavoured, as has been often done since, to give to Moses a Platonic interpretation,—or even, as has also been a favourite notion with many moderns, attempted to trace the doctrines of Plato to an acquaintance with the Hebrew Scriptures. But upon the whole the belief and the morality of the Hebrews, as also in later times the doctrines of Christianity, remained altogether foreign to the notions of the Greeks and Romans. They knew not what to make of these remarkable novelties, and even after a more intimate acquaintance in the sequel, they never wrote as

if they were at home in them. Nor could it well be otherwise, where even the first and most simple views concerning the origin of man and his being, as well as concerning the sources of all knowledge and the purpose of all wisdom, were so diametrical-ly opposite and inconsistent. According to the ruling belief of the Greeks and Romans, the first of the human race sprung up everywhere like vege-tables, or rather in the same manner that the heat of the sun calls out living things from mud and refuse; mere manifestations of that activity and fermentation which is inherent in nature, and leads her to produce crude and imperfect creatures rather than to produce nothing at all. In this mode of treating the subject, one element of the human being—earth—received too great a degree of con-sideration; the other and more dignified element—the Godlike spark in the human frame—was viewed as the result of a theft from heaven, and the reward of a successful knavery. Moses, on the other hand, taught that man grew not up everywhere and by chance, but was framed and fashioned by the hand of God himself out of the earth in one particular spot; and that the spark of divinity with which he is animated was not the fruit of robbery or auda-city, but freely communicated to him by the love of his Maker. This doctrine affords the best clue to the history of man and that of his mind—and also

the best point to which we may refer all the other traditions and all the other doctrines of the East. According to it the oldest dwelling of the human race—and the scene of their earliest developement, lies in the Middle Asia, between the Euphrates and the Tigris, the Gihon, the Ganges, and the South Sea ; the present race of men are entirely separated from that early people by an universal catastrophe of natural desolation. The nations which have become again cultivated since this catastrophe, may all be referred to three great families, remarkably distinguished from each other by their spirit and character. The first is one spread abroad for the most part in that same Middle Asia, and from the earliest date more enlightened than the others. The second is a race diffused principally over the north, of peoples more rude indeed, but at the same time less corrupted and debauched in their manners, and on that account destined to derive in after times the chief benefit from the more early civilisation of their Eastern neighbours. The last a race of men which had indeed a very early part in all higher knowledge and refinement, but sunk even in the oldest times into unworthiness and neglect from their fearful moral corruptions, and that mental bewildering and apathy to which these gave birth.—This account of Moses is so confirmed to us by all the monuments and testi-

monies of antiquity to which we have access, is so extended and strengthened by every inquiry which we pursue, that it is well entitled to be viewed as the foundation of all historical truth. The two component parts of our revelation—the Mosaic and the Christian—form in different ways the two centre points of the history of the human race. Christianity gave to the whole civilised world of the Romans a new creed, new manners, and new laws, an altogether new morality, and thereby in the sequel—(for all art and science must ever proceed from the mode of thinking and the mode of life, and ever keep in harmony with these)—a new and a peculiar system both of science and of art. The Mosaic remains, on the other hand, can alone enable us to occupy the right position from which all the other wisdom of the Eastern nations should be surveyed. Not that the civilisation of some other nations was not in time precedent to that of the Hebrews. That such was the case among the Egyptians we have irrefragable proof in those giant works of architecture, those monuments which are still surveyed by modern travellers with the same feelings of awe and astonishment which they excited more than two thousand years ago in the breasts of Herodotus and Plato. Even before Moses there were hieroglyphics, and be-

says of himself that "he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." With right were science and art (which are vessels chosen to contain heavenly wisdom and to be subservient to it alone) soon taken away from the Egyptians—who confined them both within the narrowest limits, and converted them to the most unworthy of purposes. The Mosaic writings possess this advantage over all other Oriental works, that they alone present to our view the well-head of truth in its original purity and clearness. But our modern philosophers have been very unwilling to confess this, and attempted every possible method by which they might avoid the result. Some have ascribed all wisdom to the Egyptians in the same manner which was practised by many of the ancient Greeks. Others have magnified beyond all bounds the merits of the Chinese—extolled their government and mode of life as the most perfect, and the morality of their Confucius as the most pure. Others again have pleased themselves with the fiction of an Atlantic antiquity in the North, and some have allowed themselves to be so much carried away by their admiration of the profoundness and beauty of the old Indian books, as to embrace the palpably fabulous chronology of the Brahmins, and thereby to set all criticism for ever at defiance. In short there is

no absurdity which some men will not swallow rather than repose their belief on the simple truth which is before them.

Among all those peoples which had any share in that intellectual cultivation of the East, whose high antiquity is attested by Egyptian, Persian, and Indian monuments, the Persians were in their religious belief, and the character of their traditions, most akin to the Hebrews, and, of consequence, most unlike to the Greeks. Under the mild and friendly protection of the Persian monarch, the scattered people of the Hebrews were again gathered together, and their temple rose out of its ruins. The Persians, on the contrary, bore as great an aversion as the Hebrews ever did to the worship of the Egyptians; and it was their desire utterly to extirpate it, which alone occasioned their government to have an appearance of oppression in Egypt, to which it was altogether a stranger in every other district of their dominions. Long before the Greek Gelon, with that humanity which was natural to his nation, made it a necessary preliminary to a treaty with the Carthaginians, that they should "abstain in future from all sacrifices of men;" the Persian king Darius had forbidden that abomination, from motives of religion. The Persians honoured and recognised the same God of light and truth whom the Hebrews worshipped, although in-

deed much fiction, much mythology, and not a little of essential error, was mingled with their knowledge of the truth. In the sacred scriptures themselves Cyrus is styled the Servant of the Lord—a phrase which no gratitude could ever have induced any Hebrew to apply to an Egyptian Pharaoh. The whole system of life of the Persians, and all the institutions of their monarchy, were founded upon this belief. The monarch was supposed to be as a sun of righteousness, a visible emblem of duty and eternal light; the seven first princes of the empire were meant to shadow out the *Amhaspand*, or those seven unseen powers which, as the first in the spiritual world, have sway over the different powers and regions of external nature. Such conceptions as these were altogether foreign to the Greeks. The same Syrian king who persecuted with such severity the Hebrews, and endeavoured to compel them to embrace the Grecian superstitions, was also the persecutor of the Persian faith. Even Alexander was desirous of rooting out the order of the magi, not surely because they as individuals were obnoxious to his government, but because the doctrines of their faith stood directly in the way of his great design. His purpose was to blend Greeks and Persians into one people, and indeed it is evident enough that by no half measures could this end be accomplished. It was absolutely necessary either that

the Greeks should adopt the worship of fire, and desert those temples of which the army of Xerxes destroyed so many, and which all Persians abhorred as the instruments of superstition and idolatry—or that the doctrine of Zoroaster should be extirpated and the Greek or Egyptian worship be received by the Persian people.

The essential error of the Persian creed consisted in this, that acknowledging, as was fit, the existence of a power hostile to light and goodness, they did not extend their views so far as to perceive the insignificance of this power—however great its influence may appear to be both on men and on nature—when compared with that of the Deity against which it contends; in short that this creed acknowledges two original principles, a good Godhead and an evil.

Several speculators of our modern times have been so much impressed with this resemblance between the faith of the Persians and that of the Hebrews, that they have found it incapable of being denied, and confined all their exertions to explaining it. They have said that the Hebrews during their seventy years captivity in the dominions of the great king borrowed much, or rather perhaps learned all for the first time from the Persians among whom they lived. This wilful perversion must appear in its proper colours to the

mere historical inquirer; he will at once perceive the absurdity of representing the connection between Persians and Hebrews as something so young and modern, which he can learn both from the evidence of the two nations and from the nature of the thing itself, that in truth that connection was a matter of much higher antiquity, and is one deserving of much more serious consideration than the authors of this superficial hypothesis were aware. Besides, the conception of it has arisen from a most mistaken view of the whole question at issue. The superiority of the Hebrews over all the other Asiatic peoples consists solely and simply in this—that they alone preserved that original truth and higher knowledge which was intrusted to them pure and unfalsified with the strongest faith, in blind confidence and submission, like a precious pledge, or a possession often locked up against their own use, and so transmitted it to posterity unbroken and unimpaired—while among all other nations these things were either altogether forgotten or abandoned, or mixed up with the wildest fictions and the most odious errors and abominations. This it may be thought is a merely negative sort of pre-eminence—whatever it is it belongs entirely to the sacred writings of the Hebrews, and in particular to those of Moses. In these writings whatever is meant to be a practical law to the nation is expressed with the

greatest accuracy and precision. That part of the commencement of the narrative which regards the internal man is also universally intelligible—in so much that it can be easily comprehended by the most ignorant—by a savage—or by a child almost as soon as he has the power of speech. All that regards universal history, the ramifications of our race and the early fate of men (so far as these have any connection with our religious belief), is most clear and perspicuous. Whatever, on the other side, can serve only as an amusement of our curiosity, is wrapped by Moses in obscurity and mystery. What he tells us with hieroglyphical brevity concerning the ten first fathers of the primitive world, has been spun out by the Persians, the Indians, and the Chinese, into whole volumes of mythology, and been invested with a crowd of half poetical, half metaphysical traditions. The praise of a more ardent and poetical fancy, and of more inventive metaphysics—as well as of a deeper acquaintance with nature and her powers, we may easily grant to the Persians. In all those ends also to which these are subservient, as also in astronomy, the imitative arts, or in general in whatever became an object of great study among any of the other Oriental nations, the inferiority of the Hebrews may also be admitted. But if we are perplexed with any of those dark questions which make man tremble to look into fu-

turity, where among any other nation shall we find such answers as the Hebrews can point to us in their narrative of the sorrows of Job?—a piece of writing which considered merely as such is without doubt one of the most characteristic and sublime which has come down to us from the ancient world. That peculiar faith and confidence in God which were the inheritance of the Jews, are expressed with less of the Mosaic mystery as we advance in the sacred volume, and appear in their full light in the Psalms of David, the allegories of Solomon, and the Prophecies of Isaiah. These works indeed set them forth with a splendour and a sublimity which, considered merely as poetry, excite our wonder, and disdain all comparison with any other compositions; they form a fountain of fiery and Godlike inspiration, of which the greatest of modern poets have never been weary of drinking, which has suggested to them their noblest images, and animated them for their most magnificent flights. Nevertheless the clearness of the scriptures is ever a prophetical clearness, veiled in some portion of mystery, and pointing to futurity for its perfect explication. Upon the whole the flourishing period of the Hebrews was of short duration; the Mosaic laws and rules of life were never entirely reduced to practice, for the people were at all times incapable of comprehending the purposes of their divine lawgiver. The

sanctuary after being for many years tossed about with the changeful destinies of a chastened people, appeared under Solomon in the shape of a temple. But this was soon destroyed through the guilt of the people, and, although under the protection of the Persian monarch its walls were rebuilt and its vessels collected, the flourishing period of the Hebrew spirit was for ever gone. Like the Romans the Jews also were incapable of resisting the overwhelming torrent of the opinions, education, and language of the Greeks. If we look merely to the poetical part of the Persian religion, its resemblance is much greater in that respect to the Northern than to the Grecian theology. The same spiritual veneration of nature, of light, of fire, and of the other pure elements which are set forth in the laws and liturgies of the Zendavesta, breathe in a form more intirely poetical out of the Edda of our ancestors. The same sort of opinions concerning those spirits which rule and fill nature have given rise to the same sort of fictions concerning giants, dwarfs, and other extraordinary beings, both in the old Northern Sagas, and in the still more ancient poetry of the Persians.

The high antiquity of the Indian mythology is in the main sufficiently manifest from the ancient monuments of Indian architecture which are still in existence. These monuments are in their gi-

gantic size and in their general formation extremely similar to those of the Egyptians, and it is difficult to suppose that their antiquity is not equally remote. All these monuments—both the gigantic works of Egypt covered over with hieroglyphics, the fragments of the city of Persepolis with their various shapes and unintelligible inscriptions, and lastly those Indian rocks, which we may still see hewn into the symbols of an obscure mythology, have an equal tendency to carry us back to a state of things from which we feel ourselves to be prodigiously removed both in time and in manners. We may almost say that as the traditions of every people go back to an age of heroes, and as nature too has had her time of ancient greatness—a time of mighty revolutions whereof we can still perceive the traces, and gigantic animals of which we are every day digging up the remains; even so both civilisation and poetry have had their time also of the wonderful and the gigantic. And we may add that, in that time, all those conceptions fictions and presentiments, which were afterwards unfolded into poetry, and fashioned into philosophy and literature, all the knowledge and all the errors of our species, astronomy, chronology, biography, history, theology, and legislation—were embodied not in writing, as among us puny men, but in those enormous works of

sculpture of which some fragments still remain for our inspection. Of the two great heroic poems of the Indians which are still in existence, the one treats of the achievements of Ramo the conqueror of that southern and more savage part of the Peninsula which lies nearest to the island of Ceylon. Ramo is the favourite hero of the nation; he is represented in all the majesty and fulness of youthful strength, beauty, nobility, and love, but for the most part unfortunate, and in exile, exposed to unlooked for dangers, and oppressed with sorrows and afflictions. This is the same character which, however diversified by local colouring, is to be found in all beautiful and remarkable traditions of whatever nation and under whatever climate. In the bloom of youth and beauty, on the very summit of victory, power, and joy, there often seizes irresistibly on the soul of man, a deep sense of the fleetingness and the nothingness of that existence which he calls his life. This heroic poem of Ramo appears to me in the state in which it is still to be found, and from the specimens of it which I have myself examined, to be a work of great beauty, holding somewhat of a middle place between the simplicity and clearness of Homer, and that profusion of fancy by which the writings of the Persian poets are distinguished. The other great Indian heroic poem which embraces the whole circle of their my-

theology—the *Mohabharot*—celebrates an universal struggle, in which gods, giants, and heroes, were all armed against each other. In some similar fictions respecting a war between gods and heroes, almost every people, which possesses any ancient traditions, has embodied its mysterious recollections of a wilder and more active state of nature, and the tragical suppression of an earlier world of greatness and heroism. However lately both of these Indian epics—the *Rāmayon* and the *Mohabharot*—may have been elaborated into their present form, the essence of their poetry is unquestionably old, for it corresponds in all respects with those sculptured rocks and monuments which are still the objects of the hereditary veneration of the Hindoos.

When we begin to examine in what respects the doctrines of India first acquired any influence in Europe, we shall naturally have our attention directed, in the first place, to the remarkable dogma of Metempsychosis which was said to have been introduced into Greece by Pythagoras. Among the Greeks this doctrine remained at all times foreign and unpopular. Among the Indians, on the contrary, it seems to have been believed from the earliest periods wherein we can perceive any trace of the existence of their nation. We might even say that not only all the opinions, but also all the manners of the Indians, are at this hour built upon this doctrine.

In India it is the first article of faith, which it was not in Egypt, where, although Pythagoras may very probably have heard of it, it could never have acquired any regular belief or authority, unless I am extremely mistaken in what I imagine must be collected from the very peculiar treatment of the dead which was prevalent among the Egyptians. A certain almost painful aversion and religious horror for the bodies of the dead, is so deeply implanted in all men, that nothing is more difficult than to diminish in us the influence of this feeling. The prevailing modes of treating the dead, among different nations, are not only worthy of great consideration as testimonies of their modes of thinking and degrees of civilisation; they are in general, over and above all this, very intimately connected with their secret impressions and feelings of religion. It may be worth our while to pause over them for a moment.—The mode of incremation which was most followed by the Greeks, is one of very high antiquity. It is one which is very expressive of feeling, and one which has something very pleasing in it at least for the imagination. The spirit of life ascends to heaven freely and purely among the flames; the earthy part remains behind in the ashes and furnishes to the survivors a memorial of the departed. The most singular, and perhaps the most elevating of all usages, was adopted by the fol-

lowers of Zoroaster, and is still preserved in Thibet. From a mistaken idea that the pure elements of earth or fire would be contaminated by being made the instruments of dissolution, the corpse is laid upon a platform erected for the purpose, and inclosed with massy walls, and there abandoned as a prey to the wolves and the vultures. Interment, the mode adopted by those who profess our religion, if it be attended with proper care and attention, is, after all, perhaps the most agreeable to nature. We restore to the earth what was originally derived from it, and intrust to her motherly bosom the earthly body, as a seed sown for futurity. When we know that the body itself is actually lying there, we have a more easy as well as a more impressive conviction of the repose of the soul, than when we are obliged to entomb our feelings in a cenotaph, or see the body of our friend reduced at once to the simple nature of the elements. The remarkable embalming of the Egyptian mummies is in my apprehension irreconcileable with a belief in the Indian doctrine of transmigration. That usage seems rather to set forth an indistinct feeling that this apparently dead matter is still important to the man—some mistaken and imperfect presentiment that the bond between the soul and matter is not altogether dissolved, and shall yet one day be restored—that even this matter shall have

its portion in immortality, and be again animated and awaked. Others have explained this Egyptian usage as if it proceeded from a material way of thinking, as if those who disbelieve in the immortality of the soul, would be the most anxious to guard against the total dissolution of the body.

The following appears to me to be a very natural supposition. In the numerous secret associations which were spread abroad over Egypt, there prevailed without doubt many opinions altogether irreconcileable with the popular belief which was nowhere indeed more superstitious than among the Egyptians; here and there, it is probable, these opinions contained light and truth carefully kept secret from the uninitiated; at all events they were numerous and discordant. Pythagoras might easily have been taught in Egypt a doctrine which was originally Indian, and which in the country to which it had been transplanted, was neither powerful nor universal.

The Indian doctrine of the transmigration of souls depended nevertheless on the radical notion that all beings derive their origin from God, and are placed in this world in an altogether degraded and unfortunate state of imperfection, from which state all beings, and in particular men, must either decline gradually into conditions of yet lower degradation, or rise gradually to conditions of purity

more accordant with their divine original, according as they give ear to the vicious or to the virtuous suggestions of their nature. This conception was, at all events, compatible enough with the leading doctrines of that Platonic philosophy—whose general accordance with the Oriental opinions, and the influence which these had on the intellectual character of the Europeans, shall be the subject of my next discourse.

LECTURE V.

LITERATURE, OPINIONS, AND INTELLECTUAL HABITS OF THE INDIANS—RETROSPECT TO EUROPE.

THE most remote country towards the east of which the Greeks had any defined knowledge (and their acquaintance with it was at the best extremely imperfect) was India. They more than once overrun it as conquerors, and at one time possessed for a very short period something like a fixed dominion over a part of its territory. The coasts and those other parts of the country which were most accessible, were explored and examined by them in a regular voyage of discovery. The commercial intercourse with Alexandria and Grecian Egypt was one of long duration, and without doubt attended with a very considerable flux and reflux of intellectual communication. With China, however, and the more distant countries of the East, neither the Greeks, nor in general any of the ancient nations of the West,

had any direct intercourse; their knowledge of these regions was, of consequence, altogether vague and unsatisfactory.

I have already given what I conceive to be the most probable explanation of the manner in which the originally Indian doctrine of the transmigration of souls was introduced into Greece—through the medium of Egypt, by Pythagoras. The Indian trade is of such antiquity that it ascends beyond the historical records of any civilized nation. Alexander, and after him the Ptolemies—above all Philadelphus—gave to that trade a regular direction which created the prosperity and wealth of Egypt under the rule of the Grecian dynasty. Even under the Romans this trade still continued to follow the same channel, which is indeed by far the nearest and the most natural, and which, with many variations and many interruptions, was still in the main adhered to, down to the time when the circumnavigation of Africa opened up a new path to the adventurers of the West. But it is difficult to suppose that Alexander and the Ptolemies should have so easily regulated and confined this trade to the Red Sea and Alexandria, unless private enterprise had before ascertained the practicability, and even demonstrated the superior advantages of that channel. The old connection which subsisted between India and Egypt is also suffi-

ciently manifest from the remarkable and elsewhere unknown system of *castes*, being equally adopted in both countries, and the strong general coincidence which may be observed between the mythologies of the two nations. In our own days this ancient relation between these two peoples and their theological belief, received a very striking and sensible exemplification. When in the course of the last war an Indian army was brought by the English government into Egypt, those old monuments, whose gigantic proportions are ever regarded with undiminished curiosity and wonder by Europeans, made on the minds of the Hindoo soldiers an impression no less powerful, though proceeding from a very different cause. They fell on their faces in supplication, and believed that they had again found the deities of their native land.

The very people of the Hindoos, with their manners and ideas all belonging to a remoter world, with their ancient usages, to which they cling with so much bigotry, and with their arrangement of life so widely different from that of any other nation, may be themselves regarded as a living monument, the one surviving ruin of another state of man. Their present degradation is an object not of contempt but of sympathy and compassion.

When Alexander made his incursion from Persia into the north of India (a path which be-

fore and since his time has been the high-road of so many conquerors), the remarkable spectacle of such a people must have made no small impression on the minds of the Greeks. Their wonder must have been no less than that of the first modern Europeans who found their way to that long-sought land. The Greeks found in India, as they had before done in Egypt, not a little that was new to them and foreign to their manners, but they were not repelled by an altogether irreconcileable superstition as among the Persians and the Jews. Here, as in Egypt, they found themselves still surrounded with the well known symbols of a poetical polytheism, which in all radical matters manifested its kindred with their own. They even recognised, or thought they could recognise, the same deities which they had been wont to worship, although concealed under some considerable variations of form and colouring; and they shewed in the most striking manner their faith in this coincidence by the names of the Indian Hercules and the Indian Bacchus which were afterwards so common among them. They seized upon the apparent resemblances with the enthusiasm which was natural to them, and traced them with that keenness of penetration which was no less peculiarly their own. It was indeed a ruling passion of the Greeks to magnify the wonders of all that they had seen: and of their talents for

poetical exaggeration, we have many specimens in their accounts of those countries which were first laid open to their inspection by the conquests of Alexander. But we must not forget that many things which were looked upon as entirely fabulous by those ancient readers who perused the historians of Alexander, have in the course of modern discoveries received the most perfect confirmation; exactly as has been the case with some of those yet more early accounts of Ctesias which were regarded as the most improbable of fictions by his ignorant contemporaries at home. If we make allowance for many natural enough mistakes, and apparent contradictions with regard to particular points, the description which the Greeks have left of India agrees in the main very strikingly both with the present aspect of that country, and with the best sources of ancient information to which we have otherwise access; insomuch, that each may reciprocally serve as a commentary on the other. The same Indian recluses whose peculiarities are every day described to us with the utmost accuracy by missionaries and Englishmen, with whose doctrines and singular mode of life all the books and poems of the Hindoos are filled,—these *gymnosophists*—were found by the soldiers of Alexander exactly as they are to be seen at present, and excited in them so much astonishment, that they invent-

ed a new word to describe them. The Greeks found two ruling sects of philosophers in India, the *Brachmans* and the *Samaneans*, and it is still easy to trace with clearness in the old works and fountain-heads of ancient Indian learning, two separate systems both originating among the Hindoos. The one of these, indeed, which was more recently introduced into India itself, although it endeavoured to keep as near as possible to the ancient doctrines, yet, as it was essentially hostile to the distinction of casts, and the exclusive authority of the Brahmins, it was never received into general favour, and has left only traces which it requires the skill of an antiquarian to discover. Its unpopularity in India perhaps contributed not a little to its extensive reception in Thibet, China, and the whole middle and northern districts of Asia. Even the word *Samanean*, by which the Greeks designated the one of the two sects which they found in India, is pure Indian, and is expressive of that internal equability and stillness of mind which is still talked of as the first step to perfection in all the ethical systems of the Indian devotees. The name of *Schaman*, which is so widely diffused over the whole middle and north of Asia, and universally applied to denote the priests and sorcerers of these regions, is evidently derived from the same origin with that Indian word which was first

brought into Europe by the followers of Alexander.

The older doctrine of India is that which prescribes the worship of Brahma, and his prophet and spirit, creative thought and lawgiver—Menu. The fabulous chronology of the Brahmins is carried by them even into their literature; they ascribe all their oldest works to persons entirely fabulous, and carry them back to an antiquity which is altogether poetical. Since some European scholars, in the enthusiasm of their first admiration, have not scrupled to admit of this fabulous antiquity, it is the less wonderful that others have gone into the opposite extreme, and treated the antiquity of all Indian works as a fable. It is difficult to say which extreme is the most absurd. The code of Menu, translated into English by Sir William Jones, is of all those Indian works which have been faithfully rendered into the European languages, the most ancient, the most authentic, and the most entire. This book of laws is one of those which, after the fashion of remote antiquity, embraces the whole of human life, and contains not only a system of morals, and a representation of manners, but also a poetical account of God and spirits, and a history of the creation of the world and man. In the same way that the Greeks of the most ancient period, before the invention of prose writing, were

accustomed to compose all their histories and narratives, all their books of instruction, their laws, and in short whatever they wrote, in plain verses—at times indeed entirely destitute of all poetical ornament; so this ancient Indian law-book is composed in a measure and distich of the most primitive simplicity. Many of its maxims are full of meaning, and several passages are extremely poetical and sublime. That strange system of life is everywhere depicted and prescribed, which, as I have already said, is throughout dependent on the idea of the transmigration of souls. Perhaps among no other ancient people did the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and the belief in a future state of existence, ever acquire such a mastery over all principles and all feelings, and exert such influence over all the judgments and all the actions of men—as among the Indians. While in the poetical creed of the Greeks, the world of shades occupies only a dark and remote place in the back-ground, and leaves all the hopes and enjoyments of life to be concentrated upon the present, among the Indians the place of true prominence and reality is assigned to the future, and the earthly life is represented as at best an obscure introduction to that of heaven; every thing is viewed as preparatory to another state of things, and the present is everywhere depicted as dark and unsatisfying. Whatever is good in

the present life is, according to the Indian opinions, only a foretaste of futurity; whatever evils we encounter are the consequences and the punishment of sins committed in some former state of being. The nearest bonds of love and nature derive from these doctrines a new force. Father and son are in their innermost being so intimately connected, that even death has no power to dissolve the union of their destinies. Marriage becomes a more sacred tie when we suppose that its endurance is not limited to a single life. It is this spirit which breathes over all the fables, and poetry, and institutions of the Indians, and which constitutes the true characteristic of their opinions. From the descriptive poems of the Indians, we must seek to gather what influence those opinions had on human life and all its relations and feelings; what sort of poetry, and what sort of feeling of the lovely and the beautiful, were produced among the Indians by the adoption of ideas to us so foreign and unaccountable. The first things which strike us in the Indian poetry are that tender feeling of solitude, and the all-animated world of plants which is so engagingly represented in the dramatic poem of the *Sokuntola*; and those charming pictures of female truth and constancy, as well as of the beauty and loveliness of infantine nature, which are still more conspicuous in the older epic version of the same

Indian legend.* Neither can we observe without wonder and admiration, that depth of moral feeling with which the poet styles conscience " the solitary seer in the heart, from whose eye nothing is hid ;" and which leads him to represent sin as something so incapable of concealment, that every transgression is not only known to conscience and all the gods, but felt with a sympathetic shudder by those elements themselves which we call inanimate, by the sun, the moon, the fire, the air, the heaven, the earth, the flood, and the deep, as a crying outrage against nature and derangement of the universe. We cannot so easily come to enjoy the descriptions of the fearful deaths of the Indian penitents, even although these are throughout diversified with many touches of tenderness and feeling, or the still more common narratives of the immolation of widows.—I may perhaps be pardoned for saying a few words concerning that most singular usage of the Hindoos,—one which, when the death is altogether voluntary, constitutes suicide, when it is the consequence of half-compulsatory exhortations, constitutes human sacrifice, and which is doubly terrible when it breaks the ties which connect the mother with her children. Europeans have not as yet been able to put a stop to this practice within the limits

* Translated by the author, in his book "*über die sprache und weisheit der Indier.*" § 308—324.

of their government; at least only a very few years have elapsed since instances of it occurred even in the immediate neighbourhood of Culcutta. The chief principle of the English administration in India is indeed nothing else than to rule the Hindoos in a manner entirely conformed to their own customs, usages, and native laws, and by doing so—whatever instances of individual oppression may have occurred—they have in fact been the benefactors of the Hindoos, in delivering them from the persecutions of Mahometan intolerance. The more the English territory is extended in India, the more necessary does this systematic forbearance for all Indian usages become; especially since a trifling violation of some prejudices of the military excited the alarming disturbance of Vellore. It is easy to see why this forbearance has been extended even to the blameable extremity of sanctioning human sacrifices and inclemations. These are indeed but too likely to become more and more frequent, as the natives (attached as they are to their customs with the most slavish bigotry, and watching over their preservation with the most jealous solicitude) come to be more sensible of the weight which they derive from their numbers. The Brahmins, too, are, without doubt, fond of nourishing the fanaticism of the people by these tragic spectacles.

It has been often said that the practice originat-

ed in the operation of jealousy, and a regular plan for the degradation of the female sex. But I am much at a loss to conceive how this can agree with that high reverence for females which is everywhere inculcated in the laws, and exemplified in the poems of the Hindoos. Besides, the idea of depressing and despising the female sex is one entirely at variance even with the present opinions which prevail among them ; although, indeed, it is not improbable that the example of their Mahometan masters may have in some degree corrupted the purity of their ancient manners. Others have, and I think more happily, considered this custom of voluntary burning as akin to those death-sacrifices by no means uncommon among savage, and particularly among warlike peoples ; in these the object was to furnish the departed ruler or hero with whatever he might be supposed to need in another life, such as his horse, his armour, and his slaves. Sometimes also, in the agony of sorrow, the friends or the beloved of the hero plunged into the same grave, or ascended the same funeral pile with his remains, that so all that was dear to him in life might be swallowed up in one common ruin with the illustrious dead. Even in India these apparently voluntary, but often reluctant sacrifices of women took place originally only among those of the warlike *cast*. They were never universal ; in the ancient times they must

have been exceedingly rare, otherwise they could scarcely have been celebrated as they are, as specimens of heroic and admirable devotion. The undoubting expectation of an immediate and personal reunion in another life, must have greatly contributed to render this sacrifice possible; but it must always be difficult to imagine how such as were mothers could venture upon it, especially when we remember, that in all representations of Hindoo life, the devoted affection of mothers for their children is described as being, if possible, carried even farther than is usual among ourselves.

Of all Indian poems, so far as we are as yet acquainted with them, that of Sokuntola (which has been translated with the most scrupulous exactness by Jones) is the work which gives the best idea of Indian poetry; it is a speaking example of that sort of beauty which is peculiar to the spirit of their fictions. Here we see not indeed either the high and dignified arrangement, or the earnestness and strength of style which distinguish the tragedies of the Greeks. But all is animated with a deep and lovely tenderness of feeling; an air of sweetness and beauty is diffused over the whole. If the enjoyment of solitude and musing, the delight which is excited by the beauty of nature, above all, the world of plants, are here and there enlarged upon, with a gorgeous profusion of images, this is but the cloth-

ing of innocence. The composition is throughout clear and unlaboured, and the language is full of graceful and dignified simplicity.

The account which is given in the Indian mythology of the invention of poetry and the Indian rhythm, is entirely in harmony with the spirit of poetry such as this. The sage Balmiki, to whom one of the great heroic poems (the Ramayon) is ascribed, saw, as it is said, two lovers living happily together in a beautiful wood, when of a sudden the youth was murdered by a treacherous assault. In the midst of his sorrow at this spectacle, and his compassion for the lamentations of the deserted maiden, he broke out into words which were rhythmical; and so were elegy and the laws of versification discovered. The whole poetry of the Indians is full of inward love, tenderness and elegy. Such indeed was the fit mode of telling the story of Balmiki,—how Ramo the favourite hero of India wandered in the wilderness, how he was dragged from his beloved Sita, how she sought for him long and in vain, and how they were at last reunited. But the Indian poetry is rich also in heroic and lofty representations, and the joyful and brilliant side of life has its full share in the pictures of that comprehensive poem, which is compared in the introductory hymn to a mighty lake.—“ The hills of “ Balmiki arise out of the lake of Ramo, which is

" altogether free from impurities ; it abounds in " clear streams, and there are bright flowers upon " its waters." But in none of the Indian poems is there so much of joy and the ardent inspiration of love as in the great pastoral of Gita Govindo. The hero of this poem is Krishnoo, when he (like the Apollo of the Greeks) wandered on the earth as a shepherd, attended by nine shepherdesses. The composition, however, is not so much an Idyll, as a series of dithyrambic love songs, whose high lyrical beauties (whether the fault may be in Sir William Jones or in the English language), are by no means preserved in the translation. The import was perhaps too bold to be susceptible of any literal rendering. As it is, Jones has given us only a faint shadow of the power of the original. Even this, however, is of great value to the lover of poetry, for he may easily draw from it some idea of the beauty of the Indian imagination. The well known book of fables Hipotadesa, on the contrary, is rendered with the utmost accuracy. It is the first fountain from which all books of fables are derived. Its narrative is distinguished by the most artless simplicity and clearness, but interspersed, here and there, with profound maxims, and many beautiful fragments of the more ancient poems. The narrative is indeed meant only to serve as a vehicle for this anthology of poetical images and

moral observations. The whole is admirably calculated to rouse and exercise the reflection of youth ; but it contains so much of what is repugnant to our ideas, that we cannot in fact be fair judges of the effect which it must produce.

The translations of Wilkins, Jones, and those who have adopted their method, are upon the whole extremely faithful. Of the few versions which have appeared in the French language, the most are only slight extracts ; and those which do set before us the substance of entire old Indian works, are never executed from the original language, but from translations into some of the modern Hindoo dialects, so that in the course of the double process many blunders and omissions, and not a few barbarous interpolations and additions, are to be complained of. This is particularly the case with the work called Bagavadam, the only one of the eighteen Puranas which has as yet been translated. Other works, the compositions of men who were either altogether unacquainted with the ancient language, or who were incapable of selection, contain only the substance of oral communications of the Brahmins, and extracts from older or later writings mingled together without taste or discernment. Roger belongs to this class, and many works of the older travellers, as also the collection which has more lately been published from the papers of Polier.

All the works of Mahometan authors which relate to Indian affairs must be used with great caution. It is true that they are extremely valuable when they contain historical representations of the actual state of India, and the remarks of eye-witnesses, as, for instance, the description of India, which was executed at the command of the Emperor Akbar, in the *Ayeen Akbery*. But wherever the Mussulman authors treat of the Hindoo philosophy, whether in the way of analysis or of translation, we must be very much upon our guard. Their mode of criticism is childish; their mode of translating is coarse, blundering, and not unfrequently unintelligible; but, above all, they are utterly incapable of feeling or comprehending the true nature and import of opinions so different from their own. For these reasons one of the very worst sources of information with respect to Indian antiquity is the *Ouknekhat*; it is indeed almost entirely useless, and so much the more worthless because we possess many better and authentic monuments of the same sort. The quantity of materials is immense; and the Brahmins have a passion for ascribing a fabulous antiquity to all works which in any way relate to their mythology and their system; so that in truth no study requires more caution and discrimination than that of the literature of Hindostan.

In many Indian works there occur copious no-

tices both of Alexander the Great and of Sandrocottus, who succeeded Porus as his Indian lieutenant,—of these the age is ascertained from internal evidence. In others we can perceive allusions which shew them to have been written about the time of the first Mahometan conquests. But here one should be very careful not to come to a hasty decision concerning the authenticity or age of whole works, merely from meeting with particular phrases or sentences which may have been interpolated by some later hand.

The Indian works are destitute both of the advantages and the disadvantages which they might have derived from being handed down by oral tradition in the manner which has rendered us so very dubious as to the original formation of the great old works of Grecian genius. It is scarcely possible to doubt that the oldest of these were committed to writing as soon as they were composed, for there exist in India specimens of sculptured writing whose antiquity is at least as great as that of any Indian poems now extant.

It is very remarkable that among the many Indian monuments which are decorated with sculpture (and almost their whole mythology is to be seen hewn out in rocks), there should be found no hieroglyphics. In the Phoenician alphabet, and those derived from it (including the alphabets of the

west of Asia and of Europe, which have all one common origin), the shapes and even the name of the letters, prove beyond all doubt that they were formed out of the hieroglyphics which preceded them. The Indian alphabet exhibits no such traces; nay its construction renders it extremely improbable that it was derived from any similar origin. This is a circumstance on many accounts worthy of much attention, in particular when we reflect that by the concurrence of all historical testimonies the use of decimal cyphers had its commencement in Hindostan. That was, without all doubt, next to alphabet-writing, the greatest discovery of human genius, and the honour of it remains undisputed with the Indians. If, however, the Indian works have been more fortunate than the Greek in escaping the dangers inseparable from compositions handed down for ages by recitation, they have on the other hand been so much the more exposed to the dangers of wilful falsification and additions. The more apparent these are in some works, the more are those to be prized in which we cannot detect any traces of them. The Puranas, (a sort of mythological legends) contain the greatest number of suspicious circumstances. The works which are apparently most free from all defects of this kind are those heroic poems of which I have spoken above. Perhaps of all known books there

is none which carries with it more convincing proofs both of high antiquity and perfect integrity than the law book of Menu. Whoever has any acquaintance with researches and doubts of this sort, will feel, even in reading the translation, that he has before him a genuine monument of antiquity. Sir William Jones (the greatest Orientalist of the eighteenth century, and one of the most accomplished scholars to which England has ever given birth) gives it as his opinion that this book is of an age somewhere between Homer and the Twelve Tables of the Romans. I think he has supported this opinion with very convincing arguments, and I have indeed no doubt that both the book of Menu and some others might have been seen by Alexander the Great in a state not materially different from that in which we possess them.

After the code of Menu, among books valuable as guides to the knowledge of the Indian opinions, the first place belongs to that didactic poem, which has been translated by Wilkins, under the name of the Bhogovotgita. This contains an account of the modern system of Indian philosophy—a system originally of the same nature with the doctrine of that other religious sect or party which the Greeks found in India, and called, by way of distinguishing them from the Brahmans, by the name of *Sāparas*. It is in truth only an episode of one of

the great heroic poems—the Mokabhiarot, but it is throughout philosophical, and its contents are such that it may be considered as a complete epitome of Indian mystics. It is still in great repute, and is in fact an abstract of the prevalent opinions of the present day. It is worthy of remark that the deities chiefly praised and exalted in this book are ones in a great measure unknown to the ancient law-book, or at least occupy in it a much more humble situation; there prevails indeed in the Bhogovotgita a very evident tendency to combat on all occasions the more ancient system, the vedas, and the whole doctrine of Polytheism. Its doctrine is one of an absolute divine unity, in which all differences disappear, and into whose abyss all things are gathered. Yet whenever mention is made of mythology the belief inculcated is that of a poetical pantheism. Not unlike the New-Platonic philosophy, which, although breathing the same spirit of unity, lent itself to the cause of external polytheism, in the hope of infusing a new life into the superannuated superstitions of the Greeks. The worship of Vishnoo and Krishnoo, which is now the prevailing one in Hindostan, differs very little, so far at least as it is here described, from the religion of Budha and Fo—which was, as we know, established in Thibet and China, during the first century of the Christian era, and which has been so diffused over the middle

and northern countries of Asia, by the preaching of the Schamans. The principal difference consists in this, that the worshippers of Vishnoo have found themselves obliged to retain the system of casta, while it has been long since entirely abolished by those of Budha. The recluses or Gymnosophists, which appeared so remarkable to the Greeks, belong to both of the two sects of Indian philosophers, and act upon principles equally acknowledged by them both. Their retirement from the world, their mode of life altogether devoted to contemplation, even their violent penitences, cannot fail to recall our recollection very forcibly to the first Christian recluses of Egypt. But there is one great point of difference between them. That man must in a certain sense abstract himself from the world and its concerns, in order to be able to live only for himself—is a thought so natural, that upon it were founded all the systems of Grecian ethics. More inquirers than one have been very fond of observing the coincidence between the life of entire abstraction and uncitizenship recommended by some of the Greek sects, and that adopted by the Christian recluses. Not only Plato, but even Aristotle himself (the most practical of philosophers) is inclined to give to the life of retirement, and meditation devoted to internal energies, a decided preference over that of external exertion. But even if we

should be disposed to admit that the individual recluse may thus be furnished with a good opportunity for cultivating his own intellect, there is no question but the whole society must be a loser, by the most cultivated intellects being withdrawn from its service. The principle, that man, in order to reach his highest perfection, must learn to give up himself and his bodily enjoyments, is one which cannot, I think, be much controverted; but that sort of living death—and that series of penances and martyrdoms which are in credit among the Indian devotees, have an evident tendency to stupify and blunt the mind, to lead us into a world of sleepy superstitions, and above all to nurture within us a sort of spiritual pride and vanity which it should above all things be the object of a philosopher to avoid. According to the true spirit of Christianity the external abstraction from the duties of citizenship ought to be connected with the highest internal activity, not only of the spirit but of the heart, and thereby re-operate in the most beneficial manner on all the constitutions of the society which is abandoned. The whole activity of citizenship, all its duties and labours, are, after all, directed only to a few leading purposes, and confined within certain limits. There remains ever a yet wider sphere for the exercise of that restless activity by which man is tempted to struggle for every thing that is within his

reach. This is afforded, for example, in the first ages of national developement, by the sciences and the arts of peace. When the state is so far advanced that these are taken into the circle of active employment, there still remain the needful to be assisted, and the sorrowful to be comforted: or, if these be all removed, there remain yet higher duties, such as to prepare men for ends more exalted than any duties of citizenship, or to watch over the truth in the midst of times of moral relaxation, to guard it from the slow poison of forgetfulness, and transmit it to posterity in all its original soundness and integrity. These are the things which draw a line of essential distinction between those Christian recluses who renounce the world that they may live entirely for their higher calling, and the sluggish degradation of the indolent and self-torturing Hindoos.

But this propensity to a life of retirement and contemplation is by no means the only point of resemblance between the Hindoos and the Christians. The Indian idea of a threefold Godhead is one, I confess, upon which I am inclined to lay very little stress. Some such division, some allusion to a threefold principle is to be found in the religion of most peoples, as well as in the systems of most philosophers. It is the universal form of being given by the first cause to all his works, the seal of the

Deity, if we may so speak, stamped on all the thoughts of the mind and all the forms of nature. The Indian doctrine of a threefold principle is extremely different from ours, and, at least in the manner in which they themselves explain it, is extremely absurd, for the cause of destruction is by it supposed to form part of the highest being. That principle of evil, which, in the Persian theology, is represented as in perpetual opposition to the God-head, is by the Indian divines united with the creating and preserving power, to make up the being of the Deity himself. God is according to their first maxim "all in all," and they think that it is as much a part of his prerogative to be the cause of all the evil in the world as of all the good.

The idea of incarnation, so prevalent among the Indians, bears little resemblance to any thing in our religion, and is indeed everywhere overburdened with the most absurd fables. We may trace a much more solid resemblance in those ruling feelings both of life and of poetry to which I have already directed your attention. In all the poems and works of *our* ancients (the Greeks) we cannot but be sensible of an excessive repose; they who are best able to appreciate the beauty of their writings will agree with me in thinking that, even in those cases where the most open expression of deep feeling, morality, or conscience, might have been ex-

pected, the Greek authors are apt to view the subject of which they treat as a mere external appearance of life with a certain perfect, undisturbed, and elaborate equability. The feelings whose expression would in many cases be the most appropriate are to them uncustomary or unknown. We may well say that repentance and hope (I mean that higher hope which has eternity for its object) are Christian feelings. Akin to these are all feelings and sentiments which are connected with the present abject condition of our being, and a sense of the perfection from which we are fallen. But among the Indians the feeling and sympathy of guilt are above all others predominant. I have already mentioned that according to their descriptions of a moral transgression, it is something of which all nature is conscious—an outrage against the universe. The solitary voice in the heart, for such is the name by which conscience is called, opens to us a new sense, an ear, as it were, by which we gain acquaintance with the affairs of a world, which would otherwise be entirely imperceptible to us. But this voice is but too often drowned in the noise and tumult of the world, and in order to have its suggestions brought with more power before our minds, we require to observe the effects which the same offences that call down its reproaches, produce on the feelings of those around us. On such ideas and such

feelings as these not only has the Indian imagination explained all the outward appearances of life. The whole of nature assumes a similar form. In every thing that surrounds him, the Indian sees beings endowed with a nature and feelings like his own, suffering like himself under the burden of former transgressions, enclosed like him in some temporary form of unworthiness, but still capable like him of all the tenderness of recollection and all the disconsolate-ness of foresight. He is united with all nature by the ties of brotherhood, and has his ears open on every side to the voice of compassion. The general system under which he believes the world to be governed, is one of so much harshness, that to make it tolerable he stands in much need of all the alle- viations which can be afforded him by the balsam of love, and his faith in the presence of this all-ani- mating sympathy.

But the most remarkable point of resemblance between the Indian and the Christian doctrines, lies in the absolute identity of conception with which both describe the process of regeneration. In the Indian creed, exactly as in our own, so soon as the soul becomes touched with the love of divine things, it is supposed to drop at once its life contaminated by sin, and, as the phoenix rises from its ashes, to spring at once into the possession of a new and purified existence. So universal is the prevalence

of this idea among the Indians, that the soul so purified is said by the Brahmins (with the same words and the same meaning familiar to ourselves), to be *New-born*. But even here there is ample room to perceive the superiority of our Christian religion. That religion has indeed no more than either reason or nature, opposed at any time, the hereditary advantages of earthly possessions; the idea of any such social equality has been confined to a few doting and ignorant enthusiasts. But on the other hand, Christianity acknowledges distinctly and broadly—the principle that all men are equal before God; a principle much better calculated than the other to nourish within us the noble spirit of freedom. In the Christian system, all heavenly possessions are the free gift of heaven, and they are often conferred on those whom we should be apt to consider as the most mean and the most unworthy. In the religion of the Hindoos, those blessings which ought to form the common hope of all men, are represented as the peculiar privilege of certain casts. What encouragement for pride on the one hand! what sources of self-despising thoughts and voluntary degradations on the other!

In spite of all these errors and all this palpable inferiority in the Hindoo system, the resemblance between it and the Christian is nevertheless

sufficiently distinct to have given rise among certain critics to the idea that the Brahmins have borrowed many of their opinions from our gospels. I think, however, that the prevalence of such notions in India, at a period much more early than this, is proved beyond a doubt by historical evidence. Besides, I am not of the opinion that we ought to be so much startled by the discovery of any such imperfect anticipation of the truth. We might with equal reason take it for granted, whenever we meet in the writings of the other Asiatic nations any thing which bears a strong resemblance to the traditions of Moses, or the allegories of Solomon, that the authors of these writings must of necessity have had in their hands copies of our Old Testament exactly like ourselves. Although the stream may be both distant and impure, it may still retain something of the nature of its original fountain. The seeds of all truth and all virtue are implanted by nature in man—the image of God. He has often indistinct surmises of things which are not till long afterwards to be perfectly revealed. The first fathers of Christianity found in the life of Socrates and the doctrines of Plato so much that harmonised with their own system, that they scrupled not to say these philosophers were both in some measure Christians. As all the manifestations of nature are connected with each other by the common

principle of being, and as all exercise of reason must give birth to somewhat similar results, so also, in a higher region, all those truths which relate to divine things, are mysteriously kindred to each other. When one step is given man easily goes farther. It is only necessary that the first spark of light should be given from above; *that* man can no more strike out for himself than he can create for himself a new body or a new soul. It is true that there are many thoughts, many trains and worlds of thought, which are originated by man himself; but these thoughts are mere emanations of selfishness, narrow and unprofitable, and tending to no issue. We can no more say that truth and light are in these, than that pure morality consists in pride and vanity.

The great picture of the developement of the human mind and the history of truth and errors, is becoming more perfect in proportion as we are becoming acquainted with a greater number of nations possessing systems and mythologies of their own. Things which in the Western world appear always at a great distance from each other, are often found in the most intimate union among the remote nations of Asia. While the Persians bear in every thing which respects religious belief a nearer resemblance to the Hebrews than to any other people, the poetical part of their mythology

is extremely similar to the Northern theology, and their manners have many points of coincidence with those of the Germans. Among the Indians, again, we find a mythology resembling partly that of the Egyptians, partly that of the Greeks, and yet comprehending in it many ideas both moral and philosophical, which, in spite of all differences in detail, are evidently akin to the doctrines of our Christian religion. There is indeed no reason to doubt that there existed a reciprocal communication of ideas between India and those countries which had the nearest access to the ancient revelation. The Persians had without doubt obtained the mastery over Northern India before the days of Alexander, or, at least, they had from time to time overrun and conquered it. And Persian ideas and doctrines might very easily be circulated in India; for although they differed greatly in institutions and opinions, the two nations were originally connected both by language and descent. Even the expedition of Alexander, although the authority it established was of no long duration, may have left a very considerable impression on the minds of the Indians. As in the Grecian opinions and mythology much more is of foreign origin than one would at first be inclined to believe, in consequence of the art with which the Greeks rendered every thing which they borrowed from other nations Greek;

even so there may be much in the sacred books of the Brahmins originally derived from the opinions of foreign nations. The very uniformity and bigotry of Indian thought, must have soon lent an Indian air to whatever was ingrafted on it—and may thus have been productive of the same effects as the restlessness and variety of Grecian intellect. Although India received, perhaps, in the more early periods, no return from Egypt for the knowledge which she communicated, the case may have been very different afterwards, and the Indians may have derived some notions of the doctrines of Judaism and Christianity, through their intercourse with the Egyptians. I have indeed little doubt that the later writers of Hindostan have had the benefit of some such communication. The first diffusion of Christianity on the coast of Malabar is supposed to have taken place so early as the age of the Apostles. We have besides historical evidence of a Christian mission having been sent from Egypt into India about the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century. At that period India was also connected in the way of trade with Ethiopia. While Armenia, Syria, Egypt, and Ethiopia, remained entirely Christian, and either in subjection to the Byzantine empire, or on terms of friendly alliance with it, the intercourse between the remoter East and the West, by way of Constantinople, must

have been extremely easy. The last writer who describes the Indians of the sixteenth century as an eye witness, says expressly that he found their seas and havens filled with Persian vessels. The power of the Persians was very predominant by land also previous to the appearance of Mahomet; they had already considerably reduced the extent of the Eastern empire. In consequence of Egypt and Syria being taken away from the Byzantine empire by the successors of Mahomet, the old intercourse between the East and the West was for a time interrupted; but it was restored with great success by the operations of the Crusades.

The epoch in which the different opinions of the Asiatics began to be introduced and opposed to each other among the Europeans, was that which takes in the period between Hadrian and Justinian. But even in the earliest times of Christianity the influence of these Oriental systems was sufficiently apparent. The mystical sects of the first century consisted in a great measure of persons who had embraced different dogmas of the Oriental philosophers, and who endeavoured to blend these, as well as the fictions of altogether inconsistent mythologies, with the doctrines of the new faith. Even the greatest of the first Christian philosophers, Origen,

was a believer in the transmigration of souls, and many other Oriental opinions altogether irreconcileable with Christianity. In the New-Platonic philosophy which undertook the defence of the old Polytheism, and was professedly hostile to Christianity, the Egyptian taste made daily steps to predominance. This philosophy was a strange, chaotic, and fermenting mixture of astrology, metaphysics, and mythology. The propensity to secret and magical arts—whose mysteries were frequently sinful as well as foolish—grew daily more and more into a passion. Such was the philosophy, and such the opinions which it was the ambition of the Emperor Julian to establish on the ruins of Christianity. The more Christianity increased, the more universal and comprehensive must the struggle between it and the old religion have become. The antipathy natural to two contending parties yields an easy explanation of the early persecutions of Christianity. It is not possible to doubt that Diocletian had a regular plan in view, and was resolved at all hazards to extirpate our religion. But the cause of truth was strong, and its strength became sufficiently manifested in the time of Constantine. The victory which the new religion then gained was, however, not so much due to the exertions of that prince, as to the same internal strength which had been the

protector of Christianity during all the assaults of Diocletian. The establishment of Christianity has, however, been numbered among the merits of Constantine, and it is no wonder that the fame of such a service has induced posterity to throw a merciful veil over all his faults. But the genius of the old religion was not yet entirely overthrown, and the contest was once more renewed, and that with redoubled spirit, under Julian. This was a prince, whatever his other qualities might be, of very splendid talents ; he attacked Christianity not by open force like Diocletian (which was indeed by this time out of the question), but with ridicule, and all manner of traitorous arts and reproaches. His most insidious attempt was to render Christianity contemptible, by representing it as a system incompatible with all higher intellectual accomplishment and education. The modern panegyrists of Julian have many points of resemblance to the subject of their eulogies ; but if they would descend to examine a little more closely into the true nature of that scientific superstition to which Julian was attached, perhaps they might see less reason to identify their own cause with his.

Even after Christianity had outstood this last regular attack upon her existence, she had still to contend with a strong opposition from the philoso-

phers down to the time of Justinian. That prince banished the philosophers who were her principal enemies from his dominions. They took refuge in Persia, where they soon became dispersed and forgotten; and so terminated the remarkable contest between the heathen philosophy and the Christian religion.

LECTURE VI.

INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON THE ROMAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE—TRANSITION TO THE NORTHERN NATIONS—GOTHIC HEROIC POEMS—ODIN, RUNIC WRITINGS AND THE EDDA—OLD GERMAN POETRY—THE NIBELUNGEN-LIED.

I HAVE now attempted to give you a view of three periods of literature. In setting before you the two first of these,—the flourishing era of Greek intellect, from Solon to the Ptolemies, and the best and properly classical time of Roman literature from Cicero to Trajan,—I had an easy task to perform. For by merely passing in review, and pointing out the characteristic qualities of the individual writers, I did all that was necessary in order to give you a distinct idea of the spirit and progressive character of the whole subject—of the various and intermingled revolutions of progress and decline, by which the literary history of some remarkable centuries was distinguished.

The case was very different with regard to the third period, between Hadrian and Justinian. The object here was not to describe the forms of particular compositions, and the merits of individual authors, but to set before you a view of progressive changes in general thought. My purpose was to display the great struggle between the world of antiquity and the new Christian faith; the influence which was produced by the introduction of a new religion from Asia into Europe; the fermentation which was produced both among Greeks and Romans by the influx of Oriental dogmas and Oriental mysticism. My task was here a much more difficult one. In order to describe this conflict of Asiatic opinions, and the whole picture of Asiatic traditions, I was compelled to speak of nations whose literature has altogether perished, such as the Egyptians; of others whose ancient literature is known to us only by the imperfect productions of after ages—such as the Persians; of the Hebrews—whose sacred writings contain indeed all the old literature and poetry of the nation, but are viewed by us in a manner little adapted for exact criticism, impressed as we are with habitual reverence for what we conceive to be the repositories of divine communication; last of all of the Indians, whose literature is rich and various, but known to

us imperfectly, and from sources often of very dubious authority.

Even in the greater proportion of authors (both heathens and Christians) which were produced by Greece and Rome in the time between Hadrian and Justinian, the principal object of attention is not the form of composition, but the spirit and import and developement of opinion. Should any one attempt to depict this period by going regularly through the catalogue of its writers, and assigning to the compositions of each their due share of critical blame or approbation; the consequence would only be, that our ideas would be bewildered, and we should entirely lose sight of the main object of importance. It is true that all manner of literary information, and literary facilities, were extensively diffused during this period; perhaps the spirit of inquiry, and the love of investigation, were never so common or so lively as at this very time, which was above all others the most fruitful in the production of all sorts of errors and superstitions. If we look to the universal activity of intellect, the wide diffusion of knowledge, errors, traditions, and erudition of all kinds, we cannot hesitate to consider this age as, in a mere literary point of view, one of the most accomplished and remarkable that the world has ever seen. But our conclusion would be very different, if we should direct our attention only to the

character and original genius of its individual great authors, and their skill and taste in language, style, and composition. In poetry, to which among all the departments of literature the first place is ever due, during the whole of this period nothing really new or great was produced. It produced indeed great masters of eloquence, for that was a talent of which the Greeks were never destitute; but what is there either in the form or art of their rhetoric that is either new or remarkable? The highest praise to which the best orators of this time can lay claim, is that their style and language are still such as to recall to our recollection, or even to sustain a comparison with, the better ages of antiquity. The Greek language was indeed still preserved in great purity and perfection. To some of the great Christian orators, such as Basil and Chrysostom, we must however allow the farther praise of having directed that rhetoric, which was natural to them as Greeks, not to sophistical topics, which was the chief error of their predecessors, but to the developement of the most sacred truth, and the purest morality. But in truth, the ambition of writing well was no characteristic of this age. The Christian fathers had other things in view than to shine as authors, and the same thing may be said of their heathen opponents. How can any one talk of Plotinus or Porphyry, or even of Longinus, as writers—after

having read Plato? and yet these are the very men whose writings merit our chief attention, since their opinions exerted the greatest influence both on their contemporaries and on posterity. In general individual distinctions were lost sight of in the overpowering bustle and conflict of the age. There are in the history of literature, epochs wherein all the praise, both of style and intellect, belong to the genius of individuals who had outstripped their generation; there are others in which individuals go for nothing, and all our attention is riveted on the great motions of the common mind. The historian of literature must be impartial, and represent with equal fidelity all the modes of intellectual manifestations; he must give due space both to the repose of artificial developement, on the one hand, and the creativeness of chaotic ferment on the other.

If we regard only the intellectual strength which was ranged on either side in this great contest, we shall find that the powers of the two parties, both in talents and in erudition, were pretty fairly matched. With perhaps some few exceptions, every incident of the conflict was produced by the merits of the two causes, not the excellencies or defects of the individual combatants. Among the Greeks, at the beginning of this period, the heathenish party had certainly the advantage; the Greek

literature had its last fine season at a time when the Christians under Antoninus scarcely ventured to bring forward a single writing in defence either of their persecuted faith or their calumniated lives. Even among the Christian party, the Greeks still maintained their reputation of superior intellectual attainments; the first philosophical and learned apologists, the first great orators and historians of Christianity, were all Greeks. The superiority both in talents and learning began every day to be more and more on the side of the Christians. But even after the new religion had acquired a complete victory, and become the established faith of the empire, among the Greeks at least, the heathen party were still distinguished by the most commanding talents. Even those last philosophers who opposed Christianity, and attempted to restore heathenism, after it had fairly been abolished, were men who are, when considered in relation to the time which produced them, worthy of very high admiration, whether we regard the profoundness of their views, the extent of their learning, or even the elegance of their compositions.

In the West the case was very different. There we have only a very few heathen writers—and these ones of no great importance—opposed to a whole body of Christian literature in Latin. It is true that this Western literature is not worthy of being

compared, either in respect of talents or erudition, with the Christian literature of the Greeks. The Romans had indeed at no time any great talents for philosophy and metaphysics; even their language was against them, and its defects are no less visible in Augustine than in Cicero. It was not till long after the Latin had become a dead language, that it was moulded by the violence of foreigners into a state capable of expressing in some degree, (however imperfectly) the subtleties of those born dialecticians and metaphysicians—the Greeks. The greatest and most original work which the later Latin literature produced is unquestionably that in which St Augustine has attempted to give a Christian interpretation to the greatest work of ancient philosophy—the republic of Plato, and the ideal system of man and society which it contains. But even this work, although it professes to be chiefly occupied with matters of the most abstract nature, such as the destiny of man and the ideas of social arrangement, is in truth not so much a metaphysical as a moral work. It is, however, a moral work in the most extensive sense of that word, for it contains many admirable criticisms on the work of Plato, a theory of human life, and an abstract of the philosophy of history. Even in the Christian age, the national distinctions of Greeks and Romans were still kept alive, and if the former were

remarkable for skill and subtilty, the latter were no less so for practical intellect and soundness of understanding. These qualities of the Roman mind, embodied as they were in that admirable system of laws which was preserved all over the Roman west, among the learned and the clergy, are entitled more than any others to our gratitude. It is to the influence of the Roman jurisprudence, united with the spirit of freedom and natural feeling, introduced by those German tribes which conquered and restored the Roman empire, that we must ascribe the successful developement and dignified attitude of modern intellect.

Christianity (as given to the Teutonic nations by the Romans) on the one hand—and the free spirit of the North on the other, are the two elements from which the New World proceeded, and the literature of the middle ages remained, accordingly, at all times, a double literature. One literature, Christian and Latin, was common to the whole of Europe, and had for its sole object the preservation and extension of knowledge: but there was another and a more peculiar literature; for each particular nation in its vernacular tongue. The first great patrons of modern literature—Theodorick the Goth, Charlemagne, and Alfred—had accordingly in all their labours a twofold object; the one, to preserve undiminished, and to render more gene-

rally useful, that inheritance of knowledge which had been transmitted down in the Latin language; the other, to improve the vernacular tongue, and thereby the national spirit—to preserve the poetical monuments, but above all to give a regular form to the dialects of the North, and render them capable of being used in subjects of science. The poetical, creative, and national part of the literature of the middle age, is indeed for us both the most useful and the most pleasing; but the Latin part must by no means be passed over in silence, for it is the only bond by which modern Europe is connected with the whole of classical as well as Christian antiquity.

The last incidents in the history of the yet living Latin language, which had so great an influence on the developement and peculiar character of the Romanic dialects, its offspring, and in general on the poetical spirit of the middle ages—were the following. With the translation of the Bible into the Roman language, there commenced an altogether new period—a late and in many respects a rich after-harvest of Latin literature. From the close of the old classical period under Trajan, till the age of Christian writers in the fourth and fifth centuries, we find an almost total pause; scarcely, here and there, a single work in the Roman language, and even these ones of very little importance. That

better and more important works of that period have perished we have no reason to suspect. The Greeks had at this time a visible superiority. If in the centuries which I have mentioned there arose not only among the Christian party, but also among their opponents, several better writers both in poetry and in history, perhaps we must ascribe the honour of these to the great stirring of intellect which then took place, and the revolution introduced into both language and literature by the new religion, and the zealous warmth of its defenders. Thus once more did the Roman intellect owe a period of intellectual and literary exertion, not to its own unassisted efforts, but the influence of causes altogether foreign and external. The imitation of Oriental models became now the moving principle of Roman writers, as the imitation of Greek models had been the moving principle of their predecessors. In one point of view perhaps this was by no means an unfortunate change; at all events the copying of Greek poetry and eloquence was in the classical age itself a work of labour and imperfection, and could not have been restored with any prospect of success. That elegant and periodic mode of composing prose, which seems to have been quite natural to the Greeks, remained at all times foreign to the structure of the Roman language. A few, indeed, of the most eminent Roman authors mastered this

difficulty, and attained to a noble and simple mode of composition; but all the rest, even those who are entitled to be called excellent writers, struggled unsuccessfully with the foreign form, and vainly attempting a too close imitation of the Greeks, lost and bewildered themselves in an inextricable labyrinth of over-loaded periods. The Roman poets, in like manner, when they venture to assume the rich and ornamental clothing of the Grecian muse, can very seldom get rid of an air of pedantic constraint and obscurity. Even the Greek versification which they adopted (with the exception of the hexameter alone, and perhaps the elegiac measure,) never became thoroughly familiar to Italian ears. The elaborate system of quantities seems to have been quite beyond the reach of the common people, and this may perhaps be one reason why Horace, a writer of whom the moderns are so fond, was far from being equally felt and admired by his countrymen even of the times immediately succeeding his own. A great part of his harmony was altogether unintelligible to the Roman people.

The Roman language, although in the end it became extremely polished, and attained, in subjects connected with law, with warlike affairs, and with the useful arts, a richness, and at the same time a precision, to which no other can lay claim, had nevertheless at all times two great wants—the

want of ease in prose, and the want of boldness in poetry. In both of these respects it might have received great improvement, and probably, but for some unfortunate obstacles, it would have done so—from the revolution which was now taking place. Any great improvement was indeed impossible without the operation of some such violent cause, for such a cause alone could bring about a complete desertion of the old manner of writing; and so long as that was adhered to, to get rid of the old defects was evidently quite impossible. The knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures was above all things calculated to answer these purposes, for in them the greatest sublimity of poetical thought is ever united with the most unaffected simplicity of expression. To shew what might have been produced by the study of those matchless writings, I shall only direct your attention for a single moment to the common version of the Psalms,* which is in fact part of the first translation—commonly called the Italick. I appeal to the feelings of every man who can feel and appreciate the high dignity and noble strength of the Roman language, whether these do not appear to be completely revived in this incomparable version. I am almost tempted to doubt whether the whole circle of Roman literature can

* In the Vulgate.

shew a single imitation of Greek poetry so eminent-
ly happy as this translation of the sacred songs of
the Hebrews ; wherein the utmost elevation of sen-
timent is throughout accompanied with the most
chastened simplicity of style. Even in regard to
musical sound, the superiority of the Roman lan-
guage is here so conspicuous, that in our own
days the great composers of the higher music still
give the preference to the old language, over its
harmonious daughter the Italian. The true reason
why the Roman language derived no lasting im-
provement from any of these things, was this—
that, even before the conquests of the German
tribes, it had begun to be radically corrupted by the
influence of the provincials. In proportion to the
decline of her political power, Rome, already the
centre of all ecclesiastical influence, began to make
every day more and more rapid approaches towards
a complete supremacy in all matters of intellect and
taste. But the effect of this upon her own litera-
ture was far from being good. Even so early as
the days of the first Cæsars it was the opinion of
many, that there were some defects in the Latinity
of those Roman writers who were natives of Spain—
that they wrote with the air of men speaking a for-
eign language ; and indeed many modern critics
have thought they could trace no inconsiderable re-
semblance between the antitheses of Seneca and the

✓ bombast of Lucan, and some prevailing errors in taste among the modern Spanish writers. But how much more common must these provincialisms have become in the age of which we are now treating; an age wherein the greater part of the Latin writers—and indeed almost all the first Latin fathers—were natives either of Africa or of Gaul. It is scarcely to be doubted that in the many far dispersed provinces of the empire, several distinct Roman dialects were long before this time formed. Even in Italy there is every reason to believe that the language of the common people differed materially from that of which the Roman writers made use, and which was spoken in the metropolis. It is to this Romanic dialect of the common people—the *Lingua Rustica* as it was called—that the modern Italian grammarians are fond of ascribing the origin of their own language, rather than to the change wrought on the proper Latin tongue by the invasion of the Northern tribes. In the mean time, as Rome had been originally not only the fountain, but perhaps the only seat of pure speaking, so the language remained much longer pure in her than in any other part of the empire. The most eloquent and powerful writer among the Latin fathers—St Jerome—was not indeed a native of Rome, but he had at least received all his education there. And, however inferior the language of the fifth century

must of necessity be to that of Cicero, yet in Jerome we see much both of the true strength of old Latinity, and the unequivocal elegance of classical cultivation. The change upon the Latin language must have been great indeed, when, in consequence of the prodigious influx of Goths into Italy, and of many of these settling in Rome itself, the language began to be spoken and written by a great population to which it was altogether foreign. Although no absolute mixture of the languages as yet took place, yet it is certain that the Latin underwent at least such an alteration as rendered it a matter of labour and exertion for the Romans themselves to preserve in their speech any share of that purity which was formerly natural to them.

This indeed begins to form a characteristic feature in all the Roman writers of the age of the Gothic king Theodorick. With him antiquity ends, and all the writers after his time may be said to belong to the middle age.

However favourable its consequences may have afterwards been, there is no doubt that the first introduction of Christianity must, like every other great revolution, have produced a temporary interruption in all art and all literature. Perhaps of all the fine arts, that which suffered the least was architecture, for the new religion not only adopted the finest old buildings for its own purposes, but sug-

gested the idea of new buildings which could have had no existence under the former system, or among any people ignorant of the peculiar character and sublimity of the Christian worship. In the same manner that the Greeks had of old formed a truly Grecian architecture out of the elements furnished to them by the Egyptians and other nations, the Christians now made use of the beautiful forms of the Grecian architecture, and formed out of them a new style which was purely and originally a Christian architecture. How soon this took place may be learned from the admirable church of St Sophia in Constantinople, which was built in the time of Justinian by Anthemius—himself not only a great practical architect, but also a great and scientific writer upon the theory of his art. The absurdity of calling all the Teutonic architecture of the middle ages by the name *Gothic* has been often remarked; but there is no doubt that, during the period of their empire in Italy, the Goths erected many buildings which still survive as specimens of their architectural skill. The fate of the ancient music was in like manner fortunate; its most simple and noble species were at once adopted into the service of the Christian church, and we still listen to many ancient Roman airs, adapted to the service of hymns and psalms, and invested with a more solemn and ethereal harmony by the majestic accompaniments

of the organ. The interruption in sculpture was much greater. The images of the ancient gods, so long as they were considered as such, and not viewed merely as specimens of art, were objects of unmingled aversion to the early Christians. The representation of our Saviour and the Virgin which soon became common among them, were not intended to serve any other purpose than the excitement of pious reflections. They afforded very little scope either for sculpture or painting when treated in this way, and to make use of them as vehicles for the expression of beauty, whether in form or sentiment, was the thought of a period as yet far distant. But yet greater than this, and indeed far greater than any other, must have been the interruption which took place in poetry. Some few indeed still persisted in making a poetical use of the old Pagan mythology; but as all the particulars of that system had already been completely exhausted, and the belief itself was utterly gone, nothing more was attainable than a faint and elaborate imitation of the matchless works of the true Pagans. The attempt to form a new and properly Christian poetry was indeed extremely successful in the department of hymns and songs, for in these the warm expression of feeling was alone sufficient to constitute excellence; and, besides, the Christian writers had this advantage, that they were almost compelled

to follow the example of the very best models they could have had—the psalms of the Hebrews. But the more ambitious attempts to describe in poetry the whole system of Christianity, were in general, as has very frequently been the case in modern times, altogether unsuccessful; the form of composition borrowed from the ancient poets was little adapted for such subjects, and the result was only a collection of uninteresting centos, possessing indeed the attributes of metrical arrangement, and elevated language, but utterly destitute of all that life and spirit in which the essence of poetry consists. For these Europe had to look to her other fountain of inspiration—the North.

In the very earliest Roman accounts of the German nations we find many notices of their extraordinary love for poetry. The songs in which the actions of Hermann * were celebrated have perished; so also have those inspiring strains, with which the prophetess Veleda was wont to animate the courage of the Teutonic Batavi, when they, after long following the Roman banners against their brethren of Germany, undertook at last to maintain a war in defence of their own freedom; and found too late, by sad experience, that the time for resistance had gone by. The mythological poems of these

* Arminius.

Northern nations must naturally have been forgotten after the adoption of a new religion. But the most essential part, the spirit and strength of their poetry, was kept alive in the historical heroic poems. These, in process of time, came to be composed with greater elegance of language and versification, to be softened by the refinement of manners, and to be beautified and ennobled by the spirit of love and thoughtfulness.—And such was the origin of that chivalrous poetry which is (in this shape at least) altogether peculiar to Christian Europe, and has produced effects so powerful on the national spirit of its noblest inhabitants.

Of the Teutonic nations converted to Christianity the Goths were the first who possessed historical heroic poems of the kind to which I have alluded. Gothic heroic poems were already sung in the time of Attila, and they continued to form the amusement of the court of King Theodorick. Even the Latin writers of that age make mention of them, and some of them have transmitted to us as true history in prose, particulars relating to the antiquities of the Northern tribes, which were in fact only the poetical ornaments of these heroic legends. The fame of the royal line of the Amali, and all the heroes of that race, seems to have been the favourite subject of these poems. In the sequel both Attila and Theodorick, and after them Charle-

magne himself, were honoured with a similar celebration.

Of Gothic literature we still possess one monument, the Bible of Ulphilas; and it is evident from it that the Gothic language had at least made very close approximations to a regular construction. This version of the sacred writings was originally executed for the use of those Gothic tribes which occupied the countries on the Danube; but we have the clearest evidence that the very same dialect was spoken by the Goths in Italy. It is expressly stated that Theodorick favoured impartially the progress of both literatures—the Latin and the Gothic. We know indeed that he encouraged the translating of Latin books into Gothic, exactly as the great Alfred, somewhat later, did that of the same books into Anglo-Saxon. From the manner in which the Latin historian Jornandes acknowledges his obligations to the heroic poems of the Goths, there is great reason to believe that he, or rather the authors whom he transcribed, had not barely heard these poems recited, but seen them committed to writing at the court of Theodorick. And this is rendered the more probable by the circumstance of these poems having been, so far as we can judge, principally occupied with the achievements of the royal race of the Amali. A prince like Theodorick would neglect no means to secure the

preservation of such interesting records. But with the disappearance of the Gothic nation, its language also, and all the monuments of its greatness, passed away. These were indeed preserved in some measure among the Spaniards after they had elsewhere been forgotten, for it was the ambition of the Spanish monarchs to trace their lineage to the old Gothic kings. But in Italy, on the contrary, every Gothic monument seems to have been studiously destroyed; for there the vanity of the great families took a different turn, and they were willing to sacrifice all the proofs of a true Gothic or Longobardic pedigree, for the sake of fabricating a descent from some of the patricians of ancient Rome.

If we reflect on the nature of the prevalent tastes of that age, we shall, I think, have no difficulty in concluding that those songs of the German bards, which Charlemagne caused to be collected and committed to writing, could scarcely have been any thing else than similar heroic poems relating to the first Christian period, and the great expeditions of the Northern tribes. He was to the German bards what Solon was to Homer or the Homeridæ. Now we have still extant heroic poems in the German language, wherein Attila, Odoacer, Theodorick, and the race of the Amali are celebrated, in conjunction with many heroes both Frankish and Burgundian, all mingled together without scruple by the bold

anachromisms of a most uncritical age. The present shape in which these poems appear bears indeed the clearest marks of an age long posterior to that of Charlemagne. But perhaps it is not too much to say, that we have still in our possession, if not the language or form, at least the substance of many of those ancient poems which were collected by the orders of that prince; I refer to the *Nibelungen-lied*,* and the collection which goes by the name of the *Heldenbuch*.†

The opinion that the poems collected together by Charlemagne referred to Hermann or Odin, or in general to the Pagan antiquities and mythology of the old Germans, can I apprehend be entertained only by those who have not looked with sufficient accuracy into the spirit of that age. I shall bring forward a single historical evidence, which may I think greatly contribute to put an end to the dispute. This is the still extant formula of that oath by which the Saxons renounced heathenism on their conversion to Christianity. Its words are as follows : —“ I renounce all the works and words of the Devil, Thunaer (that is the God of thunder or Thor), and Wodan, and Saxon Odin, and all the unholy that are their kindred.” This formula is indeed commonly ascribed to the eighth century, rather before the time of Charlemagne; but

* Lay of the Nibelungen. † Book of Heroes.

that is of no importance, it is quite sufficient evidence of the spirit of those days. Odin was still worshipped in Saxony in the age of Charlemagne, and sacrifices were offered to him on the Hartz that he might assist the Saxon armies in their wars with Charlemagne himself. How then can we believe that, in such a state of things, Charlemagne would make collections of heathenish poetry in praise of Hermann or Odin ? From the same oath another historical truth of great importance may also be gathered ; and that is—that Odin was a person altogether distinct from Wodan, having Saxony expressly mentioned as his native land. Even the legends and histories of Scandinavia, although they might very easily have appropriated Odin entirely to themselves, are yet uniform and consistent in relating that he was at first King in Saxony, and came from thence to Sweden, where he built Sig-tuna and established his great empire. The testimony of the Anglo-Saxons is strongly in favour of the same account—and their testimony is of very considerable weight, for their kings (and among the rest Alfred) traced their genealogy in the right line to Odin. This Anglo-Saxon genealogy is supported by so many historical proofs, and the effect of the coinciding testimonies of these two distant nations is on my mind so strong, that I have little hesitation in adopting the opinion of those who con-

sider Odin as a historical personage. I agree with them in thinking it extremely probable that he lived about the third century of our era—a time in which the Romans, too weak to make attacks, and yet too formidable to be invaded, had perhaps fewer means of knowing what passed in the north of Germany than at any other period either before or afterwards. It is I think in these facts that we must seek for the reason, why the name of Odin, so pre-eminently illustrious among the Saxons and the Scandinavians, remained comparatively unknown not only to the Romans but to all the nations of the West. I imagine that we must consider Odin as belonging to the same class with many deities of the classical mythology. He was, I doubt not, a prince, a conqueror, a hero, and at the same time a poet; he was the author of prophetic songs, by means of which he, in conjunction with priests, seers, and other poets, his coadjutors, introduced great changes into the theology of his countrymen; if he did not create a new system, he at least formed a new epoch in the old; and, as he had made pretensions during his life to supernatural powers and attainments, it was quite in the common course of things that he should be deified after his death. That Odin had originally come into Saxony out of Asia, is a Scandinavian legend, or rather fancy, altogether irreconcileable with this account

of the historical Odin. The Scandinavian collectors themselves were satisfied that they could not possibly reconcile their legend with historical truth, and they accordingly had recourse to the story of another Odin—although they indeed very often confounded the two together. If I am not deceived, however, I think we may find some traces of this elder Odin in an ancient writer who is in all instances worthy of the greatest attention. Tacitus mentions, in the beginning of his treatise on the manners of the Germans, the existence of a legend—according to which Ulysses came in the course of his wanderings into Germany, and there founded the city of Asciburgum. Now the ancients were accustomed to consider legends, such as this, in a point of view of which we have no notion. They considered nothing in such traditions but the universal idea of a deity or a hero. They called the god of war, of every nation, by the name of Mars, and every deity presiding over science or art by that of Mercury, and if they did not altogether overlook local differences, they at least attached to them very little importance. Ulysses was the common idea of a wandering hero, and to him and to his son, even in the remotest regions of the West, cities, and colonies, and all manner of adventures were ascribed. Wherever they met with any legend concerning a wandering hero,

whether of the Western or of the Northern nations, their Hercules or Ulysses was always at hand, and in the history of one or other of them the foreign tradition was forthwith accommodated with a niche. The recollection of their origin, and first egress from Asia, had not entirely perished among the tribes of the North. Some legend, of this kind—of a hero wandering out of distant lands into Germany, must have been repeated to Tacitus:—and if the name was that of the elder Odin, it could scarcely fail to recall to the ears of the Roman that of the Greek *Odysseus*, and so to impress on his mind a yet stronger belief in the coincidence which he had remarked,

These historical songs, and heroic poems, were not certainly, in the older times (unless by the positive command of some prince), ever committed to writing; that was totally contrary both to the spirit of such compositions, and the customs of those who recited them. I suppose they were still left entirely to oral tradition even after the Germans had been long connected with the Romans, and lived in society with them in many different countries, and been put in complete possession both of alphabets and all the materials of writing. This, however, was probably by no means the case in respect of those prophetic songs of which the theology of Odin had such need,—and such abundance. In

these I have little doubt that letters were employed. In another work I have already taken occasion to express my opinions that the German nation were not altogether unacquainted with the use of letters, even in times preceding their knowledge of the Greek and Roman alphabets. The Runic alphabet, at least as we now have it, is indeed of a much more recent date—several of its letters are exactly copied from the Roman, but then others of them are entirely different and cannot be accounted for by any corruption of formation. The peculiar arrangement of the letters, and even the defectiveness of this alphabet (for originally it contained only 16 letters), seem to me sufficient proofs that it was an original alphabet, not one borrowed from the Romans. Even in the infinitely more perfect alphabets afterwards used by the Goths and the Anglo-Saxons, although these are in general evidently borrowed from the Greeks or the Romans, there still are to be found traces of the old Runic alphabet. For that this was an alphabet common to many at least of the German nations, is evident from the abundance of Runic inscriptions which have been discovered in all the countries formerly occupied either by Goths or Germans. Where then, it may be asked, was the Runic alphabet learned if not from the Greeks and Romans? If it is absolutely necessary to find a foreign origin for it, I

think there can be no great difficulty in discovering one which has at least probability on its side. The Phœnicians, from whom so many other nations derived their alphabets, were for many ages in the undisputed possession of the traffic of the Baltic. We have historical evidence in our hands that several of those German nations which inhabited the countries on the Baltic, were infinitely more advanced in cultivation, than the more warlike tribes which occupied the Roman frontier, and the borders of the Rhine. Here also, by the Baltic sea, was the original seat of that worship of Hertha, which is represented by Tacitus to have consisted in a species of mysteries. Perhaps the Runic characters were connected with this worship, and entirely appropriated to the superstitious purposes of its priests. That they were at least employed in magical ceremonies, is so certain that I need not occupy your time in proving it. The wooden characters were probably arranged in some mysterious order so as to answer the purpose of a rubric to the prophetic or devoting song which was muttered over them. The greater characters seem to have been again and again repeated in some method which we cannot explain, but which certainly was not without its meaning. The form in which we find the Runic letters inscribed on stones, affords, in my opinion, indubitable proof that they were at least sometimes ap-

plied to such purposes as these. It is not easy indeed for those who are at home only in the world of civilisation and refinement to enter into the spirit of these barbarous observances. For my part I have little difficulty in conceiving that the methods adopted by these Northern priests, were the very best they could have chosen in order to magnify the importance of their own attainments, and impress the minds of their pupils—or of the multitude, with a due sense of mystery and awe. But it is in our times by no means uncommon to see the same men mistaking fiction for history, and history for fiction.

In Saxony itself, after its submission to the yoke of Charlemagne, the theology of Odin became very soon rooted out. But even in much later times there remained many traces of its superstitions. The country people would not part with their *festival of Spring*, and that most innocent, most natural, and most universal of all holidays, was still hallowed with due observance at the opening of the May. Many usages of the same kind were preserved among the Christian services of the Pentecost. Even at the present day, in many of the northern districts of Germany, at that season of the year when the day is longest, great fires are kindled by night upon the mountains; a custom whose meaning has long since been forgotten, but which

is beyond all doubt another relic of that ancient system so long paramount in all the regions of the North. It was natural that those traces should linger the longest among woods and hills, which were of old the favourite scenes of this Pagan worship. Even after the lapse of many Christian centuries, a superstitious reverence is still attached to some antique and spreading oaks among the forests of the Hartz and the Riesengebirgen ;* in our popular poetry the odoriferous linden is still invested with its character of magic ; and the branches of the willow are in the hands of every fortune-telling gipsy. Many relics of the deserted faith were indeed preserved, but they soon assumed the character of mere vulgar delusions, and sunk far below the loftiness of their old religious destination. To the inspired prophetesses and mandrakes of Northern antiquity, succeeded the tricks, the execrations, and the midnight dance of witches ; and in place of Odin's Valhalla, the majestic congregation of gods and heroes—came the hauntings of the Rheingau, and the ghostly tumults of the Night of Moonwort.

In the mean time the theology of Odin, after being banished from its native land, found a secure asylum in the Scandinavian north ; where it yielded,

* The *Hills of the Giants* on the borders of Bohemia.

not till, after a long struggle, late and reluctantly to the Christian faith, and from whence the knowledge of it, preserved in many glorious songs and legends, has in later days been communicated to ourselves. It is by means of these Scandinavian remains that we are now enabled to trace the poetry of the middle ages, and in particular the whole system of Teutonic opinions, to their true sources. Above all we are indebted for these advantages to the Icelandic Edda. This work seems to have received the shape in which it now appears somewhere between the 9th and the 13th centuries—between the age of Harald Harfagr, when the Normans first established themselves in Iceland, and the death of Snorro Sturleson and the suppression of the Icelandic freedom. In its later parts we find many allusions both to the Greek mythology, and to Christianity, partly introduced with a view of tracing similarities between these systems and the Northern legends, partly for the purpose of connecting the history of the Scandinavian tribes with that of the ancient nations. But in the most admirable passages, and above all in the poetry of the elder Edda, there breathes, in its utmost purity, the true spirit of the Northern theology. The perfect unity of this system is that which distinguishes it most remarkably from that of the Greeks. The Greek theology was perhaps too rich to permit of

its being well and consistently represented in one picture. Besides, if we compare it with the Northern, we cannot fail to observe a want of proper end or purpose in the whole of its arrangement. The divine and heroic world of the Greeks is perpetually losing itself in the world of men; their poetry in the world of prose and reality. But the theology of the North is consistent and entire; every thing is foretold by prophecies, and the last long expected catastrophe is a perfect close. The whole resembles one progressive poem—one tragedy. From the commencement, which teaches how the earth and the world arose out of the carcase of a benumbed giant—and the description of those happier days when the holy ash Ysdragill, began to grow green over the old abyss—(" that tree of life which ex-
" tendeth its roots through all oceans, and spreads
" its branches over the universe")—and the narrations how bold heroes and the friendly spirits of light overcame, in many combats, the might of the giants and the old powers of darkness—down to the last great mystery, the ruin of gods and Asae—of Odin and his comrades—the whole is one great and connected poem of nature and heroism. The real object upon which its interest depends is, as in almost all other poetical legends, the termination of a glorious and heroic world. The destiny of war is ever most hostile to the

noblest, the most valiant, and the most graceful of heroes; and Odin assembles all that are slain in his Valhalla, that he may have the more friends and fellow combatants in that last war against the power of his enemies—a war in which he is of old destined to be not the victor but the vanquished. The first incident in which this great object of the whole is set forth, is the death of Balder. As in the Trojan legends, by the death of the two noblest heroes, Hector and Achilles, so here also by the death of Balder, “the favourite of all the gods, “the most beautiful of warriors”—there is shadowed out the universal decay of the heroic world. His fate is fixed by destiny; in vain does the foot of Odin tread the path to Hades. Hela, like the Theban Sphinx, gives no answer but an enigma—an enigma which is to be explained by fearful tragedies, and secure to destruction the fated prey. Perhaps the Ossianic poetry—at least so much of it as is of genuine antiquity—had its origin about the same period with these, but, as the knowledge of it was at all times confined to the small circle of the Scottish Gaels, and never exerted the smallest influence on the common literature of Europe, I shall reserve the consideration of it till another opportunity.

Among the Teutonic nations, scattered over the different regions of Europe, their original love of

poetry was manifested in a great number of attempts to set forth Christianity in verse, and to give a poetical clothing to the histories of the sacred writings. Many such attempts were made among the Saxons in England, and one in Southern Germany by Ottfried. These attempts, so far as the mere art of poetical composition is concerned, were indeed, like some more modern attempts of much greater poets, not very successful. But they have been of great advantage to us, for they have supplied the most perfect means of information with respect to the poetical language and versification of that time. Above all they are valuable, because these Christian poets did not invent a form of writing for themselves, but were contented with copying and adopting that of the heroic poems of the preceding ages. We are at least certain that this was the case with regard to Ottfried, for we have still in our hands a heroic and warlike poem of the same period, which agrees in all circumstances with the form of his writings. This is a war song, used by Lewis, King of the East Franks, in his contest with the Normans. A song of such antiquity (for it is now more than nine hundred years old) is indeed, on account of that circumstance alone, an invaluable monument. But it contains one passage which is of some historical importance. The poet describes the solemn still-

ness, and calm bravery of the marshalled army, before the moment of attack :

“ There were red cheeks in the ranks
Of the war-delighting Franks.”*

And a little afterwards, he says,

“ Now the song was sung,
And the battle begun.”†

We can see from this that the same old German custom, which is described by Tacitus, of inspiring the soldiers for action by a heroic song, was still preserved, after the lapse of many centuries, among the armies of the Teutonic peoples. That great attention was still bestowed by the Christian Germans on heroic poetry, may be inferred from the opening of one of these old poems—one which certainly could not at first sight be supposed likely to contain any warlike allusions, since it is professedly a panegyric on St Annus, the Bishop of Cologne.

“ Often have we heard bards tell,
How in the old time towers and cities fell,

* Blut schièn en wangen
Kampf-lustiger Franken.

† Lied war gesungen,
Schlacht ward begunnen.

How haughty kingdoms met their destined day,
And peerless champions bled their souls away!"*

The proper subjects of all heroic poems—the fall of nations, and the contest of heroes, are here pointed out in a manner at once short and impressive.

Although the Nibelungen-lied was not in all probability reduced to its present form before the beginning of the 13th century, yet I think the present may be the fittest opportunity for directing your attention to a composition so nearly of the same class with those we have been considering.

That skilful unfolding of incidents, and almost dramatic vividness of representation which form the chief characteristic of the Homeric poems, are qualities which were peculiar to the Greeks, and have never been imitated with much success by the poets of any other people. But among the heroic poems of those of other nations which have remained satisfied with a more simple mode of poetry, this German poem claims a very high place—perhaps among all the heroic chivalrous poems of modern Europe it is entitled to the first. It is peculiarly distinguished by its unity of plan; it is a picture, or

* " Wir hörten von helden oft mals singen
Und wie sie feste Burgen brachen,
Wie hohe königreicke all vorgingin
Und wie sich liebe kampfgenossen schieden."

rather it is a series of successive pictures, each naturally following the other, and all delineated with great boldness and simplicity, and a total disregard of all superfluities. The German language appears in this work in a state of perfection to which in the subsequent periods of its early history it had no pretensions. Along with all its natural liveliness and strength, it seems at that time to have possessed a flexibility which soon afterwards gave place to a style of affectation, hardness, and perplexity. The heroic legends of all nations have, as I have already several times mentioned, a great deal in common so far as their essence and purpose are concerned; their variety is only produced by their being imbued with the peculiar feelings, and composed in the peculiar measures of different nations. In the Nibelungen-lied, in the same manner as in the legends of Troy and of Iceland, the interest turns on the fate of a youthful hero, who is represented as invested with all the attributes of beauty, magnanimity, and victory—but dearly purchasing all these perishable glories by the certainty of an early and a predicted death. In his person, as is usual, we have a living type both of the splendour and the decline of the heroic world. The poem closes with the description of a great catastrophe, borrowed from a half-historical incident in the early traditions of the North. In this respect also as in many others

we cannot fail to perceive a resemblance to the Iliad; if the last catastrophe of the German poem be one more tragical, bloody, and Titanic than any thing in Homer, the death of the German hero on the other hand has in it more solemnity and stillness, and is withal depicted with more exquisite touches of tenderness, than any similar scene in any heroic poem with which I am acquainted.

The Nibelungen-lied is, moreover, a poem abounding in variety; in it both sides of human life, the joyful as well as the sorrowful, are depicted in all their strength. The promise of the opening stanza is fulfilled.

“ I sing of loves and wassellings, if ye will lend your ears,
Of bold mens' bloody combattings, and gentle ladies'
tears.” *

* “ Von freuden und festes zeiten, von weinen, und von
klagen

Von kühner helden streiten, mogt ihr nun wunder
horen sagen.”

LECTURE VII.

OF THE MIDDLE AGE—OF THE ORIGIN OF THE MODERN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES—POETRY OF THE MIDDLE AGE—LOVE POETRY—CHARACTER OF THE NORMANS, AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE CHIVALROUS POEMS—PARTICULARLY THOSE WHICH TREAT OF CHARLEMAGNE.

WE often think of and represent to ourselves the middle age, as a blank in the history of the human mind—an empty space between the refinement of antiquity and the illumination of modern times. We are willing to believe that art and science had entirely perished, that their resurrection after a thousand years sleep may appear something more wonderful and sublime. Here, as in many others of our customary opinions, we are at once false, narrow-sighted, and unjust; we give up substance for gaudiness, and sacrifice truth to effect. The fact is that the substantial part of the knowledge and civilisation of antiquity never was forgotten, and that for very many of the best and

noblest productions of modern genius, we are entirely obliged to the inventive spirit of the middle age. It is upon the whole extremely doubtful whether those periods which are the most rich in literature possess the greatest share either of moral excellence or of political happiness. We are well aware that the true and happy age of Roman greatness long preceded that of Roman refinement and Roman authors; and I fear there is but too much reason to suppose that, in the history of the modern nations, we may find many examples of the same kind. But even if we should not at all take into our consideration these higher and more universal standards of the worth and excellence of ages and nations, and although we should entirely confine our attention to literature and intellectual cultivation alone, we ought still, I imagine, to be very far from viewing the period of the middle ages with the fashionable degree of self-satisfaction and contempt.

If we consider literature in its widest sense, as the voice which gives expression to human intellect —as the aggregate mass of symbols in which the spirit of an age or the character of a nation is shadowed forth; then indeed a great and accomplished literature is, without all doubt, the most valuable possession of which any nation can boast. But if we allow ourselves to narrow the meaning of the word literature so as to make it suit the limits of

our own prejudices, and expect to find in all literatures the same sort of excellencies, and the same sort of forms, we are sinning against the spirit of all philosophy, and manifesting our utter ignorance of all nature. Everywhere, in individuals as in species, in small things as in great, the fulness of invention must precede the refinements of art—legend must go before history, and poetry before criticism. If the literature of any nation has had no such poetical antiquity before arriving at its period of regular and artificial developement, we may be sure that this literature can never attain to a national shape and character, or come to breathe the spirit of originality and independence. The Greeks possessed such a period of poetical wealth in those ages (ages certainly not very remarkable for their refinement either in literature, properly so called, or in science) which elapsed between the Trojan adventures and the times of Solon and Pericles, and it is to this period that the literature of Greece was mainly indebted for the variety, originality, and beauty of its unrivalled productions. What that period was to Greece, the middle age was to modern Europe; the fulness of creative fancy was the distinguishing characteristic of them both. The long and silent process of vegetation must precede the spring, and the spring must precede the maturity of the fruit. The youth of individuals has been often called their spring-time

of life; I imagine we may speak so of whole nations with the same propriety as of individuals. They also have their seasons of unfolding intellect and mental blossoming. The age of crusades, chivalry, romance, and minstrelsy, was an intellectual spring among all the nations of the west.

Literature, however, may be considered in another point of view, besides this poetical one, in which our chief attention is bestowed on invention, feeling, and imagination. It may also be regarded as it is the great organ of tradition, by means of which the knowledge of the ancient world is transmitted to the modern, and not only preserved in its original integrity, but also daily augmented and improved by the natural progress of ages. The poetical department of literature is that which has been developed in the different vernacular dialects of modern Europe; the other, which has for its object the preservation of inherited knowledge, must be sought for in that Latin literature of the middle age, which was the common property of all the nations of the west. Even with regard to this we shall find, if we consider the case with due attention, and enter into the true history and spirit of the middle age, that the progress of literature was something very different from what we are in general accustomed to suppose.

If we should take nothing more into considera-

tion than poetry and the developement of national intellect in the vernacular tongues, we might very naturally wish that no such Latin literature had ever existed, and that the dead language had gone altogether out of use. There is no doubt that its use contributed in no small degree to take away all life from history and philosophy—more particularly from the last. There was indeed something beyond measure barbarous and ruinous in the custom of treating all matters connected with science, learning, legislation, and state-policy, in a dead and foreign language. Its consequences were disadvantageous in many respects, but above all in regard to poetry. A great many poetical monuments of the Germans, and indeed of all the western nations, have perished, in consequence of the pains taken by well-meaning translators and would-be expounders—who were indefatigable in rendering every thing into Latin, and clothing what was originally true poetry and heroic legend, in the disguises of dull prose and incredible history. Many poetical works have, in another point of view, been deprived of all their living influence on ages and peoples, by the folly of their authors, who consumed great natural powers in the vain attempt to do justice to a living fancy in a forgotten language. Of this I might quote a thousand unhappy examples from the good nun Roswitha—the author of a neglected poem in Latin

upon the achievements of the great Saxon emperor, which, had she written it in German, might have furnished us with a valuable monument of language, and history, and poetry too—down to Petrarch, who despised as juvenile and sentimental trifles those Italian love-poems which have rendered him immortal, and expected to establish his true fame on a now forgotten Latin epic, in celebration of Scipio Africanus; nay I might cite before you a whole band of true poets, the greater part Germans and Italians, who flourished so late as the 15th and 16th centuries, and wrote every thing in Latin.

But the consideration of all the very evident disadvantages which resulted from the employment of the Latin language in the middle age, must not make us forget that before the several dialects now in use had acquired some degree of precision and refinement, a common language was absolutely necessary in Western Europe, not only for the purposes of religious worship, learning, and education, but even for conducting the international affairs of the different states. The language which was adopted forms the invaluable bond of connection by which the Old World is united with the New. Besides, in the countries whose present languages are of Roman origin, the Latin, in those days, was scarcely considered as a foreign or even as a dead lan-

guage, but rather as the old and genuine language of the land, preserved in its regularity and purity by the men of learning and education, in opposition to the corrupt and vague dialects of the common people—the vulgar tongues, as they were called. In those countries the Latin language ceased not to be a living one till the 9th or 10th century; for about that time the language of the people, assuming in each country a separate form, began to be no longer viewed as a mere corruption of the old Latin, but as an altogether different language. The progress to this state of things was indeed so gradual, that we can seldom define the date of the great change. But it is evident that the delusion under which men lay in considering the Latin language as still alive, many centuries after it was really extinct, was very much prolonged by the perpetual use of that language in all the observances of religion, and in all the societies of the cloisters. It sustained daily alterations, but was never altogether laid aside.

The great legacy and inheritance of all the knowledge and ideas of the ancient world is, with justice, considered as a common good of mankind, which is committed to all ages and nations in their turn, which ought to be sacred in their eyes, and for the preservation of which posterity is entitled to call them to an account. The feelings of pain

with which we contemplate any violent rupture in this bond by which we are connected with the world of our ancestors, and those of disgust with which we repel the attempts of such as would injure or weaken it, are on the whole just and honourable feelings. But it is only when we find an age or a nation to have been capable of deliberately destroying, or treating with utter contempt and neglect, the monuments of ancient refinement; in short it is only in the case of a total ruin of science that we can be entitled to heap upon them the terrible reproach of barbarity. No such total ruin ever did take place; and wilful destruction, if it did sometimes occur in regard to the imitative arts, was at the least extremely rare so far as literature was concerned. I know of no wilful destruction of literary monuments but one—the burning of certain of the then extant amatory Greek poets, which took place in Constantinople pretty far down in the middle age, and was entirely owing to sacerdotal aversion for the extremely offensive indecencies of these authors. This moral squeamishness, which induced men to forget not only the indulgence at all times given to poetical imagination, but also the reverence due to all monuments of language and antiquity, may, it is true, appear very ridiculous in our eyes. But that the collectors and transcribers of the middle age (both in the

Eastern and Western World) were, in general, tolerably free from any such over scrupulous niceties, is pretty evident from the abundant collection of indecent poems in both the ancient languages, with which we have it still in our power to regale ourselves. Unfortunate accidents, and the events of war, have indeed occasioned the loss of many interesting monuments both of literature and antiquity. This has been the case even in the more recent times, and above all since the invention of printing itself. How much more frequently must it have occurred in the times which preceded that invention, when instead of our enormous libraries of printed books, the learned had nothing but manuscripts, and these so costly that no one man could have access to many. Even in the most refined periods of the ancient world, long before Goths had possessed Rome, or Arabs Alexandria, whole libraries had fallen a prey to the ravages of hostile fire, and hundreds, nay thousands of works had perished, of which no other copies were in existence. We are accustomed to lament over the loss of a few great works, and to inveigh with unmitigated severity against the barbarity of the middle ages. But that the loss of a single work, or a single author, furnishes no ground for accusing a whole period of barbarism, may be gathered from the well known history of the books of Aris-

tote. It appears that even among the ancients themselves, such was the neglect of these writings, which we consider as among the most precious monuments of Grecian intellect, that there remained at one time but a single copy—and that too rescued from destruction by an accident of the most extraordinary nature. This occurred in the very middle of the period which we are used to admire as the most brilliant era of literature and refinement among the Greeks and Romans. And even allowing that historical criticism may furnish us with some reasons to doubt the literal accuracy of this account, yet that will very little affect my present argument. If this did not happen with regard to Aristotle, we are quite sure that the same thing happened to many other great authors, with only this difference, that the dangers from which his writings escaped proved fatal to theirs. In the western countries of Europe, after the time of Charlemagne, the multiplying of manuscripts was a work pursued with the most zealous and systematical application.—I doubt whether the same object was ever honoured with so much public patronage, either in Rome or Alexandria, or any where else during the most polished periods of later antiquity. That even in this respect Christian writings and Christian authors were more attended to than any others, is not to be denied, and per-

haps is scarcely to be blamed. But how many of the heathen and ancient Roman writers were preserved exclusively in the west? Constantinople was never plundered by the Goths, nor subjected to the licence of any whom we are pleased to call barbarians till the period of the crusades and the Turks. And yet I have little doubt that those Greek books which have been preserved for us by the Byzantines, bear far less proportion to the incalculable riches of the old Grecian literature, than the Latin books preserved in the west do to the very limited literature of ancient Rome.

Upon the whole, in the first part of the middle ages, the scientific education was very wisely directed into the channels most favourable for the maintenance of ancient learning. After those studies which had an immediate reference to Christianity, the first place was universally given to that of the Latin tongue—the only vehicle of learning which was then in use; the most important parts of the mathematics were carefully taught; and in the cloisters, to preserve the writings of the ancient authors, was not barely considered as a matter of duty, but formed the most favourite exercise of monastic skill. With regard to language, which in our present subject of inquiry, occupies the most important place, we know that the pupils of the 10th century were taught rhetoric according to the

rules of Cicero and Quintilian, and I should doubt whether either ancient or modern times could have supplied them with better guides. That the authors of the 11th century wrote more agreeably and perspicuously in Latin than those of the latest Roman age, and the 6th century, is well known to all who are acquainted with the literary history of the time. In all those qualities of good writing which are attainable by men composing in a dead language, their superiority is most evident. Next to language and its monuments, nothing else was of so great importance as the preservation of the mathematics—which are the foundation of all knowledge of nature, and the sources of so many sciences, inventions, and technical expedients, which have the greatest influence on life. The rapid increase of wealth and cities, particularly in Germany under the Saxon Emperors, and the flourishing state of architecture, and many other arts which imply knowledge and science, are sufficient proofs of the labour and exertion which were in these times bestowed on preserving from oblivion the mathematical, mechanical, and technical acquirements, of the ancients.

What we have most reason to lament is the separation which took place between the west, and the knowledge and treasures of the Greek language. But even here there was in truth no such thing as

any absolute separation. The Greek language was certainly not unknown in Germany, at least between the time of Charlemagne, who learned Greek himself in his old age, and established Greek professors in his different cities of the empire, and that of the two last Othos of the imperial house of Saxony, who were both skilled in Greek sufficiently for the purposes of conversation. Although, as might naturally be expected, the Bible and the Fathers were always the chief objects of attention, we know that Bruno Archbishop of Cologne, who was also a descendant of the same illustrious house, invited learned men from Greece for the express purpose of enabling himself, and through him others, to become acquainted with the profane writers, the historians and philosophers of antiquity. Under the dynasty of the Saxon Cæsars, who were perpetually connected by marriages with the court of Constantinople, the north of Germany was adorned with a profusion of beautiful churches, all more or less in imitation of that first model of all Christian architecture, the Greek church of St Sophia. Upon the whole, during this period,—from the 10th to the 12th century inclusive,—Germany possessed not only more political importance, but also more intellectual cultivation, than any other country in Europe.

The reproach, then, which is commonly thrown

out against the Teutonic nations—that they introduced barbarity and ignorance into all those provinces of the Roman empire to which their victories reached, is at least, in the extent which is commonly given to it, altogether false and ungrounded. To none, however, of all these nations is it applied with so much injustice as to the Goths, who lived at the time of the first northern inroads.—For many centuries before these expeditions commenced, the Goths had been already Christians; they were well acquainted with the importance of regular laws, and with the relations of the learned and religious orders of society; and the truth is that, far from promoting any work of destruction in the Roman provinces, they were indefatigable, so far as their powers and circumstances admitted of it, in forwarding and maintaining the interests of science. The only exception to this is to be found in those times when the Gothic tribes entered Italy under the guide of a foreign, a savage, and a heathen conqueror; or when in some particular instances they were exasperated by party-hatred and Arian bigotry, to take too severe revenge against the equal hatred and bigotry of their Catholic opponents. Even the last flourishing era of what might still be called ancient Roman literature, took place under Theodorick; and never did the mock patriotism of Italians take up a more ridiculous idea than in

the favourite theme of their later poets—the deliverance of Italy from the power of the Goths. In the time of Theodorick, and under the government of the Goths, Italy was just beginning to enjoy the opening of a new period of happiness. The true misery and the true barbarism began when the Goths were expelled, and Italy submitted her neck once more to the deadening tyranny of Byzantine Eunuchs and Satraps. Let us only compare for a moment the activity and life of Western Europe,—her nationalities, her adventures and her chivalrous poetry—with the long and mortal sleep under which the Eastern Empire lay for a thousand years—and we shall have no difficulty in deciding where the charges of sloth and ignorance ought to fall. And yet the Byzantines were in possession of much greater literary riches, and of several useful inventions, with which the west was entirely unacquainted. The matter of chief importance in all civilization and all literature is not the dead treasures we possess, but the living uses to which we apply them.

But the effect was beyond all comparison more unfortunate in the case of those wandering and conquering Teutonic nations which were not yet Christians; these were much more rude in their manners than those we have as yet been considering; they had no acquaintance either with the social or the scientific refinements of the Romans. Such

were the Franks in Gaul, and the Saxons in Britain. If we must fix upon some period as that of complete void,—as a time of ignorance, darkness, and destruction—we shall find the nearest approximation to what we wish in the age which elapsed between the reigns of Theodorick and Charlemagne. But while Italy remained bowed down under the barbarous oppression of Byzantium, the light of knowledge had found its refuge in the cloisters of Ireland and Scotland; and no sooner had the Saxons in England received the first rudiments of knowledge along with their Christianity, than they at once carried all branches of science to a height of perfection at that time altogether unrivalled among the nations of the west. By them this light was carried into France and Germany—there never more to be extinguished. For from this time knowledge was not only systematically preserved but unweariedly cultivated and extended, insomuch that the proper period of revival should, I think, be placed not in the time of the crusades, but in that of Charlemagne. But even in the darkest period of all, that between the sixth century and the eighth, the foundations were already laid for that mighty engine of instruction which was afterwards perfected by the wisdom of Charlemagne. The establishment of learned cloisters and brotherhoods had already commenced. It is to the after extension of these

spiritual corporations, by whose exertions lands were rendered fruitful, and peoples civilized, and sciences useful, and states secure, that Western Europe is indebted for the superiority which she attained over the Byzantines on the one hand, who were possessed of more hereditary knowledge, and the Arabs on the other, who had every advantage that external power and proselytizing enthusiasm could afford them. That the result should have been what we now see it, could scarcely, I should suppose, have been believed to be within the reach of possibility by any cotemporary spectator. While Alfred lived almost in the poverty of a poet, and while Charlemagne practised in his own palace the frugality of a monk, how must their attempts in the cause of science have been limited by the narrowness of their means? and what, on the contrary, would have been too much for Haroon al Rasheed to perform—living as he did in the midst of the untroubled splendour of Bagdad, and having it in his power to forward the cause of science by all the aids which ingenuity could invent, or magnificence supply? The result may give us an important lesson, and teach us not to repose our confidence in the munificence of kings. Science is not made to be cultivated in obedience to the command of a monarch. He lends it indeed a temporary favour, but it is only that it may increase his own fame, and throw ad-

ditional lustre around his throne. Caliphs and Sultans attempted in vain to effect what was slowly and calmly accomplished in the unpretending cloisters of the west.

The exertions of Charlemagne in securing the independence, and diffusing the establishment of religious houses, have entitled him to the warmest gratitude of Europe, and the admiration of every cultivated age. But we must not conceal from ourselves, that great as were the merits of Charlemagne, both in regard to the vernacular and the Latin literature of Europe, they were still inferior to those of Alfred. That wise and virtuous monarch was not only like Charlemagne, the unwearied patron of learning in all its branches; he was himself a scholar and a philosopher, and he even contributed more than any other individual towards the elegant formation of the Anglo-saxon tongue. But the successful expeditions of the Danes threw back the progress of England; and the literary establishments founded by Charlemagne in France and Southern Germany were disturbed, in their infancy, by the attacks made on the one part of his empire by the Normans, and on the other by the Hungarians. The literature which flourished soon afterwards under the Saxon Emperors was in every respect far superior to that of the days of Alfred or Charlemagne. At that time

Germany was rich above all other things in good writers of history, from Eginhard, the secretary of Charlemagne, down to Otto von Freysingen, a prince of the house of Babenberg, who was son to St Leopold, and grandson to the great Barbarossa of the imperial family of Hohenstaufen. Her riches in this respect were indeed greater than those of any other country in Europe, nor is the circumstance to be wondered at, for she was in fact the centre of all European politics. It is a very common thing to hear all those Latin histories of the middle age, which were written by clergymen, classed together under the same contemptuous appellation of "Monkish chronicles." They who indulge in such ridicule, must, beyond all doubt, be either ignorant or forgetful that these Monkish writers were very often men of princely descent; that they were intrusted with the most important affairs of government, and therefore could best explain them; that they were the ambassadors and travellers of the times; that they often penetrated into the remote East, and the still more obscure regions of the North, and were indeed the only persons capable of describing foreign countries and manners; that in general they were the most accomplished and intelligent men whom the world could then produce; and that, in one word, if we were to have any histories at all of those ages, it

was absolutely necessary they should be written by the Monks. The reproaches which we cast out against the men and the manners of the middle age are indeed not infrequently altogether absurd and inconsistent. When we wish to depict the corruption of the clergy, we inveigh against them for tyrannizing over kingdoms and conducting negotiations; but if we talk of their works, then they were all ignorant, slothful Monks, who knew nothing of the world, and therefore could not possibly write histories. Perhaps the very best of all situations for a writer of history is one not widely differing from that of a Monk—one in which he enjoys abundant opportunities of gaining experimental knowledge of men and their affairs, but is at the same time independent of the world and its transactions, and has full liberty to mature in retirement his reflections upon that which he has seen. Such was the situation of many of those German historians who flourished in the days of the Saxon Emperors. The more the study of history advances, the more universally are their merits recognised. But if Germany had the advantage in history, the superiority of France and England was equally apparent in philosophy. These countries indeed had already produced several distinguished philosophical writers, even before the influence of the Arabians had introduced the monopolizing

despotism of Aristotle. In the 9th century there arose that profound inquirer who, as it is doubtful whether he was a Scotsman or an Irishman, is now known by the reconciling name of Scotus Erigena. No less profound, though somewhat more limited in their application, were the views of Anselm. Abelard was both a thinker and an orator; his language was elegant, and his knowledge of antiquity extensive,—praises which he shares with his illustrious scholar, John of Salisbury.

For each of the nations which speak Romanic dialects, there must have existed an interval of chaos and confusion, before they set themselves free from the rules of the Latin language, and began to give to their own new dialect the shape of an independent tongue. But for the interference of certain unfortunate accidents, the situation of the Teutonic nations must, in this respect, have been far more favourable than that of the others. For it is a thing infinitely more easy to cultivate at the same time two languages radically distinct, than to give a new form to a language which has either been changed by some internal revolution, or mingled, in great part, with the elements of some other language. That must always be a work of great labour and patience. But it happened very unfortunately for the developement of the Teutonic language, that those of its dialects which were first

cultivated were successively forgotten in consequence of political events, and that so the mighty work of its formation was more than once to be begun again from the commencement. The Gothic language, which was the first that attained some degree of regularity, perished along with the nation that spoke it. The Anglo-Saxon attained to an infinitely higher degree of perfection, and we may even say, that, in the days of Alfred, it already possessed all the necessary parts of a complete literature ; a great many works had been composed in it, not only poems and translations, but also prose histories, and treatises concerning many departments of science. But this language also, although many of its monuments are still in existence, passed away in consequence of the Norman conquest, and a considerable interval elapsed before the present English language was formed out of the mixture of the Anglo-Saxon and the French. The work of polishing the Teutonic tongue was therefore to begin again for the third time. This took place in the 9th century ; for it was then that our present High Dutch began to be in some measure developed. If any attempts had been made upon it in the preceding century, they were irregular and unimportant in their results. In the monuments which we possess of it during the 9th century, we can perceive the same traces of weakness and unsettled-

ness which characterise every language at the time when it is beginning to recover itself after the effects of a great mixture or revolution in its elements. The High Dutch of that period was exactly in the situation in which the Romanic dialects were in the 11th and 12th centuries. We are accustomed to talk of our own language as having above all others the advantage of being pure and original. This might be very true in its utmost extent of the old Saxon language, but nothing can be less so of our present German. Ours is a modern dialect, which arose in the Carolingian age out of the confusion of many old German dialects, and no inconsiderable infusion of Latin vocables; and ought in truth to be classed among those languages which arose out of the political intermixture of the Roman and Teutonic nations. Its origin and early developement are, however, well worthy of much consideration, for it was long the language of the most cultivated nation in Europe, and its formation was the favourite object of some of the greatest geniuses the world has ever seen. The true old German language, that was originally and universally spoken by all the Teutonic tribes, was that old Saxon which attained the height of its perfection in England under Alfred the Great. That the Saxons of Northern Germany spoke the same language with those of England admits of no

doubt ; and even the Franks originally made use of it. It was common to all the Germans of the North. The Romans made use of Frankish interpreters in England ; the British Saxons required no interpreters at all in Sweden ; when King Alfred entered the Danish camp in the disguise of a minstrel, he sung songs written not in a foreign language but in his own ; and although there might perhaps be some small difference of pronunciation, he was perfectly intelligible to his audience. Which then, it will be asked, of all these German dialects was the language of the poems collected by Charlemagne ? Not the Gothic, for that was entirely gone, or at best understood only by a few scattered inhabitants of the mountains of Asturia ; nor the High Dutch, for that language was only beginning to assume a regular appearance half a century later, and received its name of Frankish, expressly because it had its origin in the Carolingian age,—the name of the ruling Teutonic tribe being used, according to the fashion of that period, to denote every thing that was Teutonic. Now it is evident that the poems collected by Charlemagne must have possessed some antiquity ; they must have existed for two centuries, or at least for one. I have little hesitation in saying, that I believe those poems to have been composed in the old Saxon language, the same which Alfred wrote, and which

was spoken by Charlemagne himself, whenever he did not make use of Latin; for we must recollect that the favourite residence of Charlemagne was in the Rhenish Netherlands, the old patrimony of the Franks, whose language was originally the same with that of the Saxons. And, if this be so, the remark which I have made, is not merely interesting for the lover of language and poetry, but may be of considerable importance to the student of history himself.

The origin of the High Dutch language seems to me to be best explained in the following manner. The original seat of all the Teutonic tribes was on the borders of the Baltic Sea, and each of them introduced into its dialect greater changes in proportion as it removed to a greater distance from the neighbourhood of those ancient settlements. The Goths, for example, were the first to extend their conquests; they founded a great empire between the Baltic and the Black Sea, and living there in the midst of many foreign nations, from each of which they were continually borrowing particular words, their dialect soon came to be intelligible only to themselves, and to assume all the appearances of a new and distinct language. In the southern regions of Germany, above all in the Alpine districts, the common influence of climate produced its effect; and the Teutonic dialect, spoken

in those regions, became hard and guttural like all languages of mountainous countries. The inextricable mingling of the various Teutonic dialects in Southern Germany, was caused by the successive empire and colonizations of the Goths and the Franks. The intermixture of Latin is easily accounted for by the Roman colonies on the Danube, and the early adoption of the Christian religion by the inhabitants of all those regions.

Of all the Romanic dialects, the first which attained any polish was that of Provence, probably because it had less than any other been exposed to the danger of foreign intermixture. The old language of the country had been very early forgotten in this first of all the Roman provinces, and the settlements of the Teutonic invaders in its territory were very short-lived and inconsiderable. To close, in one word, this hasty review of the modern European languages, the two dialects which first received a regular developement were those of the countries which had been least exposed to the mixture of foreign inhabitants,—the Provencial, on the one hand, and the High Dutch on the other. When compared with the other more blended dialects, the first of these may be considered as a pure Romanic, the other as a pure German language. Of three other Romanic dialects, which had been exposed to the greatest mixture of Teutonic, tho

Italian, the Spanish, and the Northern French, this last is the most removed from the Latin, and was the last to arrive at the highest point of its perfection. But the youngest of all these languages is the English; in it the mixture was far stronger than in any of the others, in so much, indeed, that it is not easy to decide which of its elements—the Germanic or the Romanic—has the predominance. The interval of chaos and confusion which necessarily precedes any mixture of languages, was of longer duration in England than in any other part of Europe. That even these circumstances, however, are not incapable of producing very favourable consequences—is sufficiently evident, not only from the characteristic beauty, power, precision, and elegance of the English language, but also from the high and peculiarly national spirit of the English literature. The English literature stands in the midst between the German and the Romanic, and is more original than either.

The universal awakening of a new life and a youth of feeling in the age of the Crusades, peculiarly manifested itself in the sudden and magical infolding of that poesy which received, among the Provencials, the name of *La Gaye Science*, and which, diffusing its influence over all the intellectual nations of Europe, gave birth to a rich and va-

rious literature of chivalrous poetry and love songs. Although it is the spirit of love breathing even from the chivalrous poems of that period, which forms in truth the distinction between them and all other poems of the heroic kind, I shall begin with considering those which were more expressly of an amatory nature. The poetry of love, therefore, flourished first among the Provencials, who transmitted it to the Italians. The first Italian poets wrote frequently in the language of Provence. This language is now indeed altogether extinct, but many works composed in it are still preserved in manuscript collections. Next to France the earliest flourishing period of the *gay science* was in Germany—chiefly in the 12th and 13th centuries. The love poetry of Italy attained not its perfection till it came into the hands of Petrarch in the 14th, and the proper era of it, among the Spaniards, was in the 15th century. Nay, the last celebrated Spanish poet, who procured to himself a great name by poems of this class, was yet living far in the 16th century. This was Castillejo, who followed the first Ferdinand from his native country into Austria.

The poetry of love was developed differently in the different countries of Europe, and had in each a formation in harmony with the spirit of the nation. With the exception of the Italians, I ima-

gine that no one nation borrowed much in this matter from another; while, on the contrary, the poetry of chivalry was transplanted from one to another, and was considered the common property of them all. Even the form of the composition varied in each country. The only thing that was common to them all was rhyme, and indeed a very musical use of it, which at first sight might appear to be mere playfulness and profusion. But in all probability this universal coincidence is to be sought for in the nature of the music then in vogue, for almost all the love poems seem to have been made expressly to be sung.

That the Germans borrowed their love poetry from that of the Provencials is very often asserted; but I think there is little reason for thinking so, particularly as we are quite certain that the Germans had love poems of their own at a much earlier period. For, even so early as the reign of Lewis the Pious, it appears that it was found necessary to address an edict to the nuns of the German cloisters, administering them to restrain their inordinate passion for singing love songs or *mynelieder*. It is true that in the age of chivalry some of the German princes, who had large possessions in Italy, wrote poems in the Provencial, but this is a matter of no importance in regard to the poetry of the Germans. Had that been borrowed, there is no

doubt but the minstrels of Germany would have been as willing to confess their obligations as Petrarch afterwards was ; and the more so, that the German authors of narrative chivalrous poems are fond of owning, even more frequently than we could have wished, how much they were indebted to the invention of their Provencial, or French predecessors. However this might have been, there is no doubt that the whole form and character, and spirit of the German love poems, are essentially different from those of the French or the Provencial. The German collection of this kind is, moreover, by far the richest in existence.

The circumstance which affords us most delight in these productions is the spirit of gentleness and tenderness with which they are imbued, and our delight is mingled with not a little of wonder, when we learn that their authors were not unfrequently princes and knights, with whose characters we are familiar in history, as among the boldest and the most heroic of their time. But this apparent contradiction is nevertheless very consistent with nature, and true tenderness is never so engaging as when it is united with manly valour. In the midst of the most warlike life nature still leaves room for the affections, and tempers the rage of arms with the soothing influence of love and compassion. That old melody, which is commonly as-

cribed to the English Richard, breathes the very spirit of calm dejectedness, and is indeed among the most precious of monuments, if it be really the production of the Lion-hearted king.

The softness of feeling, and the musical elegance of language by which these German poems are distinguished, have induced certain critics to throw out against them the reproaches of uniformity and triflingness. The reproach of uniformity strikes me as being a very singular one; it is as if we should condemn the spring, or a garden, for the multitude of its flowers. It is perhaps true enough that ornaments of many kinds are more delightful when they occur singly, than when we see them gathered together in masses. Laura herself could scarcely have read her own praises without weariness, had she been presented at any one time with all the verses which Petrarch composed upon her even during the period of her life. The impression of uniformity arises from our seeing these poems bound together into large collections—a fate which was probably neither the design nor the hope of those who composed them. But, in truth, not only love songs, but all lyrical poems, if they are really true to nature, and aim at nothing more than the expression of individual feelings, must necessarily be confined within a very narrow range both of thought and of sentiment.

Of this we find many examples in the high species of lyrical poetry among all nations. Feeling must occupy the first place wherever it is to be powerfully and poetically represented ; and where feeling is predominant, variety and richness of thought are always things of very secondary importance. The truth is, that great variety in lyrical poetry is never to be found, except in those ages of imitation when men are fond of treating of all manner of subjects in all manner of forms. Then indeed we often find the tone and taste of twenty different ages and nations brought together within the same collection, and observe that the popularity of the poet is increased exactly in proportion as he descends from his proper dignity,—when simplicity is sacrificed to conceits and epigrams, and the ode sinks into an *occasional copy of verses*.

The second criticism which stigmatizes these poems as trifling, is indeed founded on truth ; but I am extremely doubtful whether that prove any thing against the merits of the poems. Even the ancients, although the full violence of passion is often enough depicted in their Erotic poems, have nevertheless recognised that in its nature the feeling of love is a playful and sportive one, by the mode in which they have represented Cupid in their mythology, and the many beautiful allegories and fictions which arose out of their idea of the child.

ishness of love. That love itself was in the age of chivalry one of the most violent of passions, and often gave rise to the most daring adventures, and the most tragical catastrophes, might be easily gathered from the general character of that time. The histories of these ages are full of such examples. But this serious and passionate side of love was very seldom brought forward in the poems of the age. These are not indeed so destitute of all illusions to the senses as the Platonic allegories and sonnets of Petrarch. But even in this respect they are not in general remarkable for any violent expressions of feeling. The favourite, almost the exclusive theme of these poets, was that view of the passion which opens the freest space for the exercise of the fancy. From that high estimation of the female sex which was originally peculiar to the Teutonic nations, after it had been refined and exalted by the milder manner and loftier morality of the Christian religion, there arose a systematic tenderness of feeling which has indeed long since degenerated into the empty forms of gallantry, but which, so long as it remained in possession of its power, was the fountain of every thing noble and graceful both in manners and in poetry. It was at least in some degree on account of the prevalence of such feelings as these, that the German poets

have restrained themselves from filling their verses with ornaments which were certainly very much within their reach. The Provincial *court and laws of love*, and the metaphysical casuistry which was elsewhere so unweariedly employed in the solution of amatory questions and problems, were never introduced among the Germans. Their compositions are indeed rude and unskilful when compared with those of the accomplished and meditative Petrarch, or some of the early poets of Castille; but in return they possess more strength of feeling, and manifest greater capacity of love for nature and the beautiful.

Epic poetry belongs altogether to the world which had gone before us. That poet of any refined and polished age who dares to be a poet after the manner of the minstrels of antiquity—to be truly epic—will always be looked upon as a remarkable exception; he will be honoured and reverenced by all posterity, as a high gift of nature to the age and country in which he appears. But in dramatic poetry art maintains her pre-eminence; it is only in an age of knowledge and elegance that tragedies and comedies can be written. As youth in individuals is the period most abounding in feeling, so does lyrical poetry flourish most in the youth of nations. The age of Crusades was the youth of me-

dern Europe. It was the time of unsophisticated feelings and ungovernable passions, the era of love, war, enthusiasm, and adventure.

After the Crusades, perhaps, nothing had so much influence in giving a new direction to the imagination of the European nations, as the expeditions of the Normans. The foundations of chivalry were indeed everywhere laid in the original modes of thinking of all the Germanic nations; the poetical belief in the wonderful, in gigantic heroes, in mountain spirits, mermaids, elves, and dwarfish sorcerers, had everywhere kept its hold in the imagination, from the days of the old mythology of the North. But into all these superstitions, and all these opinions, a new life was infused by the arrival of the Normans. They were fresh from the North, and had breathed in its original purity the atmosphere of poetry and chivalry. Neither did they lose all this when they became converted to Christianity, and learned to speak French; their character had strength enough not only to preserve itself unbroken, but to diffuse a portion of its influence wherever they came; in so much that a visible change was introduced by them not only into France but into the whole of Europe. They were living models of adventure and enthusiasm; they conquered England, and Sicily, and led the way in the Crusades. Their whole opinions and lives

were poetic, and the wonderful was the perpetual object of all their worship and all their ambition. It was by no means strange that the history of Charlemagne should have peculiar charms for the Normans. The whole of it was immediately reduced by them to the shape of chivalrous poetry. The battle of Roncesvalles, in which the army of the Franks was overcome by that of the Arabs and Spaniards, and in which Roland died, was indeed, as it stands in history, an event rather unfortunate than glorious for the Franks and Charlemagne. But that, in spite of all this, the celebration of this battle had become very early a favourite theme of popular poetry, may perhaps be accounted for in this way—that, though unfortunate at Roncesvalles, Charlemagne was in the end successful, in setting limits to the progress of the Saracen arms, and erecting the Pyrenees into an impregnable bulwark before the liberties of Europe. The religious view of the matter also might not be without its influence. Roland fell in battle with the enemies of our faith; and although vanquished on earth, there was the sure crown of victory laid up for him in heaven. He had died like a hero in the cause of God, and was classed by the multitude among the glorious army of martyrs. It must have been on some such principles as these, that the famous song of Roland—used in battle even by the

Normans themselves—had been composed. For otherwise the death of an unsuccessful hero could scarcely have been selected as the subject of an animating war-song. In the age of the Crusades the whole history of Charlemagne, the battle of Roncesvalles, and the death of Roland, were represented by the poets as scenes of a religious warfare. An example for the knights and adventurers of the Crusades was shadowed out in the glorious names and achievements of Charles and his Paladines; nay, so far were things carried, that a fabulous Crusade in the 9th century was invented for the express purpose of ascribing it to Charlemagne. The authentic history of the great Frankish Emperor soon became scarcely recogniseable under the disguise which it assumed—in the midst of sultans, magicians, genii, and all the fables of the East. By and by comical characters and adventures began to be mingled with the rest. In process of time, the Oral narratives of the Crusades supplied the West with a copious assortment of Oriental fictions; and above all, men read the travels of Marco Polo (a production whose impudent exaggerations procured for its author the name of Messer Milione); the consequence was that there was nothing of the marvellous to be seen or imagined between China and Morocco which did not somehow or other find its niche in the poetry which treated of

Charlemagne and Roland. That poetry lost all trace of the true achievements and wars of Charlemagne (which in their original shape might have furnished excellent materials for a serious heroic poem), and came to be considered merely as a form or vehicle wherein all possible fictions might be fairly introduced; and where the fancy might practice her boldest gambols in the world of wonders and impossibilities. Such is the shape in which it appears in the writings of Ariosto. This great genius confiding solely in the magic of his language and narrative, has ventured to make his poem as irregular as his materials were heterogeneous; he is continually breaking off one story and commencing another; he scatters over every thing a sparkling of wit, comedy, and satire. He is the most inimitable of all poets,

LECTURE VIII.

THIRD SET OF CHIVALROUS POEMS—ARTHUR AND THE ROUND TABLE—INFLUENCE OF THE CRUSADES AND THE EAST ON THE POETRY OF THE WEST—ARABIC AND PERSIAN POEMS—FERDUSI—LAST REMODELLING OF THE NIEBELUNGEN-LIED—WOLFRAM VON ESCHENBACH, TRUE PURPOSE OF THE GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE—LATER POETRY OF THE CHIVALROUS PERIOD—POEM OF THE CID.

THERE are three different sets of fables and histories from which the subjects of the chivalrous poems of the middle age are principally taken. The first of these consists in the legends of Gothic, Frankish, and Burgundian heroes, during the times of the great Northern emigrations; these form the subjects of the Nibelungen-lied, and of those fragments which are collected together under the name of the Helden-Buch. For this set of heroic legends there is in general some foundation in history; they all breathe the pure Northern spirit, are closely connected with the traditions of the old

heathenish antiquity and mythology of the Gothic nations, and have for the most part been celebrated in the Scandinavian as well as in the German dialects. The second great subject of chivalrous poetry is Charlemagne—more particularly his war against the Saracens, his defeat at Roncesvalles, and the achievements of his Paladins. The narratives which treat of these are in general very far removed from all historical truth; the active Frankish hero is transformed in them into a mere indolent monarch, after the fashion of the Eastern sultans,—a mistake which is probably to be accounted for by the circumstance of the chief poems concerning Charlemagne having been composed by Normans, who pretty naturally imagined that great and warlike prince to have been, with all the glory which surrounded him, something not very unlike the monarchs whom they themselves found in possession of his throne. However this might have been, it is certain that the poetical histories of Charlemagne became very soon intermingled with a large proportion of incidents purely comic, and altogether covered over with a veil of absurd and fantastic machinery, through which the original facts cannot, without great difficulty, be recognised. The fate of the third set of chivalrous topics—King Arthur and the Round Table—was not very different from that of the second. The original

groundwork of history became soon very nearly undiscernible from the clothing of Oriental marvels, Crusades, and Indian achievements which was heaped upon it. The historical Arthur, a Christian king of Britain, of the Celtic race, and his wars with the first heathenish Saxon invaders of England, could have furnished indeed a very limited range for poetical embellishment. But the very narrowness of the field was the cause of its unparalleled richness of cultivation ; and the poets made ample amends for the original insignificance of Arthur, by investing him in their fictions, with all the attributes of perfect chivalry. He is the ideal of a knight, and all the poems which treat of him and his period, have more real object and purpose than those concerning Charlemagne and his Paladins. With the history of Arthur there are besides interwoven many engaging poems, in which love is depicted in the most beautiful incidents of the chivalrous life. Of these the most remarkable is throughout of an elegiac character, as might be gathered from the name itself of *Tristram*. The tenderness of this elegiac colouring is well adapted to the nature of such a narrative ; it harmonizes well with those feelings of darkness, depression, and perplexity, which rush into every mind, where we are drawn to survey the spectacle of a heroic life—when we reflect on the fleetiness of youth,

beauty, valour, and the at best perishable and unsatisfactory nature of all earthly glories and enjoyments. The poetical clothing of the marvellous, and the chivalrous, under which the fate of love is represented, has the effect of at once beautifying the fiction, and ennobling the feeling. It is in vain that modern poets, imprisoned as they are within a world of present and prosaic realities, endeavour to atone for the want of poetry by a display of natural and moral knowledge, and the wiredrawn minuteness of psychology. Not many learn to know either the world or man out of books. The true end of poetry is to awaken or restore aspirations and feelings which are the poetry of nature ; and, by setting all things in the most beautiful light, and investing all things with loveliness and magic, not so much to ennable or exalt our feelings, as to preserve and sustain them in their natural element of beauty. Among all the great and epic poems of love and chivalry in the middle age, the first place is given by all nations to Tristram ; but that we may not be fatigued by uniformity of fiction, the airy and lively legend of Launcelot is placed by the side of its more grave and elegiac representations.

But besides all this, the poetical historians of Arthur and his Round Table, had an altogether different object in their view. They endeavoured,

under the form of Arthur and his knights, (in whom was supposed to be represented the perfection of all chivalrous virtue) to shadow forth the idea of a spiritual knighthood, true, like that other chivalry, to the obligations of a solemn vow, proving itself like it by achievement and by suffering, and rising like it, by slow and gradual advances, to the summit of its perfection. This idea, however, is not allowed to interfere with the external rules of their fiction, or to make them sacrifice any of those adventures and wonders of love and war in the East and the West, from which the poetry of those days derived its most favourite embellishments. Under the name of St Graal there is brought together a whole train of such allegorical deeds of chivalry ; the knight is represented as labouring, by incessant exertions, to make himself worthy of gaining access to the holy places, and the deliverance of these is supposed to be the highest end of his calling. And yet there is every reason to believe that in all these poems the object was not merely to shadow out a spiritual and allegorical chivalry, but also to embody the peculiar ideas of a spiritual and yet a real chivalry, which was then in all its glory—the chivalry of the religious orders of knighthood, such as the Templars and the Knights of St John. In a historical point of view, this may be of no inconsiderable importance. Lessing,

the first so far as I know who started the idea, was one well qualified, both by his erudition and his judgment, to form a proper opinion on such a subject; and they who are familiar with such topics, will, I imagine, have no difficulty in agreeing with him, provided they read again these old poems with a view to this particular consideration. The purpose is indeed sufficiently manifest even in the French romances of St Graal, but infinitely more so in the more elaborate productions of the Germans.

This third set of fables then—that relating to King Arthur and the Round Table had a peculiar, sometimes a doubly, allegorical character of their own. But when I said that this set of fables, along with those of the Nibelungen and of Charlemagne, formed the only subjects of the poetry of the middle age, I perhaps expressed myself rather too strongly. A crowd of other fictions diverge in all points from these; they formed only the centre point and kernel of the imagination. I must now, however, go on to consider under what varieties of shape this chivalrous poetry appeared among all the different European nations, how long it lasted, by what gradations it gradually lost in each country its original character and destination, and in particular by what circumstances it so happened that in almost no instance did it

ever reach that degree of skilful beauty and development of which it might everywhere have been susceptible. But before I proceed to this, I must pause to say a single word concerning the influence of the Crusades on the poetry of the West—and, above all, to direct your attention to the share of that influence which originally belonged to the poetry of the East.

The chief elements of all this influence were, without doubt, no other than the incidents of the Crusades themselves, and the power which the spirit in which their expeditions were undertaken must at all times have had of arousing the imagination. The achievements of Godfrey of Bouillon were sung in the very time in which they took place, and had no need of the mystery of ages in order to make them poetical. But the poets were, no doubt, more partial to the fabulous histories of Charlemagne and Arthur, because they were well aware that the more distant their scene was laid, the more room had they for the exercise of their fancy.

The influence exerted on Europe by the poetry* of the East, made known through the Crusades, was very inconsiderable in comparison with what we generally suppose it to have been; and that which really did exist belonged in the greatest part—almost exclusively—to the Persians, not the Arabians.

Among all the works of Oriental fiction, there are two in particular which contain within themselves the best specimens of Oriental fancy, and enable us at once to perceive in what this influence consisted, and what sort of spirit that was which was either first introduced into Europe, or which at least augmented the originally kindred spirit of Northern poetry, by means of the Crusades. The "Tales of a Thousand and One Nights," an Arabian collection of fantastic narratives, and the Persian heroic poetry of Ferdusi, who has been called at one time the Homer, at another the Ariosto of the East.

The elder poetry of the Arabs before Mahomet, consisted, so far as we know, of lyrical heroic songs which, without making use of any peculiar mythology, simply celebrated warlike deeds, or the feelings of love—generally the fame of some individual hero and his ancestry. The spirit of pedigree formed almost the soul of the inspiration, and all the enthusiasm and zeal of the poet's imagination were exerted for the purposes of extolling the achievements of some one race, and undervaluing those of its rivals. And this is done with the same profusion of moral maxims and fanciful conceits which was so much in fashion all over the East. But in this old Arabian poetry there is to be found no peculiar mythology, no such world of fiction concerning gods and heroes, and spirits, and

the mighty struggles of the wonderful powers of nature, as is to be found either among the Greeks, or the Persians, or in the poetical theology of the Northern scalds. There poetry, moreover, is so very local that, so far from being capable of being transplanted into other regions, in order to understand it perfectly, we ought to become profoundly versant in all the genealogies of the Arabs. In its want of any peculiar mythology, and in the circumstance of its being entirely dedicated to the fame, traditions, relations, and opinions of a few particular families of Arabian nobility, this Arabic poetry bears a great resemblance to the Ossianic. There is, however, this great difference, that in the Ossianic poems there prevails that tone of lamentation which might be supposed to be most in harmony with the feelings of a vanquished, depressed, and almost expiring people—or, if we prefer another explanation,—of a people inhabiting the desolate borders of the Northern Ocean, and saddened by the cold mists and vapours of that dreary region. In the Arabian songs, on the other hand, there breathes such a spirit of joy, pride, and valour, as might suit a victorious nation and a burning climate. The hostile tribes are here spoken of not with sorrows and lamentations, but scorn and hatred. The great disadvantage of such poetry consists in its locality; it is an heir-loom and can.

not pass from its seat; while, on the contrary, the fictions of a more mythological system of legends are easily transmitted from one people to another, and find many points of resemblance and coincidence among every nation which is so fortunate as to have any similar possessions.

To shew how far a poetical mythology was removed from the spirit of the ancient Arabs, I need only refer you to a well-known incident in the life of Mahomet. It seems that an Arab brought to Mecca the Persian heroic histories of *Iskendar** and some other of the heroes of ancient days. These were received with much interest, being something altogether *new and unknown*. But Mahomet put a stop to the progress they were making, in the fear that his own poetry, and his own purposes, might be injured by their popularity.

That the Arabs, however, contracted, during the subsistence of their Asiatic empire, a strong passion for the magical personages of the Persian poetry, is evident from the work to which I have already alluded—The Arabian Tales. That many of these very tales indeed, and in particular such of them as are most filled with wonders and fancies—are not genuine old fictions of Arabian growth,

* Alexander the Great.

but rather belong to the poetry of Persia, and in part probably to that of India—this has been long since acknowledged by all great Orientalists. But if the Arabs, previous to their intercourse with Persia, really possessed any original and cultivated chivalrous poetry of their own, besides those old lyrical "*Tribe songs*" of which I have spoken—that is a circumstance of which the world has as yet seen no proof.

Elves and mandrakes, mountain spirits, mermaids, giants, dwarfs, and dragons, were all known in the Northern mythology long before the period of the Crusades. These were not things borrowed, but only traces of the old original identity of the Northern and the Persian superstitions. All that the Western poetry owed to that of the East, with regard to these particulars, consisted in a certain Southern magic, and Oriental brilliancy of fancy, with which these familiar forms came about this time to be invested. But the kindred spirit of the two mythologies was manifested by another and a still more important circumstance. The Persian *Book of Heroes*, in which the poet Ferdusi, about the beginning of the 11th century of our era, collected together all the legends and histories of the Persian kings and warriors, and celebrated them in the purest and most beautiful language of his country, and threw around them a blaze of fancy.

which has procured for him his name of *The Paradisaic*,—this book is deserving of great attention even when considered merely as a repository of mythological learning. The reign of Dschemschid is represented at the beginning of the poem as having been the golden age of the kingdom of Persia, and of the whole Asiatic world. Dschemschid himself is clothed with all the attributes of wisdom and victory, and appears like a bright image of the Eternal upon the earth. But after many happy centuries, when the Sun of Righteousness becomes darkened, and this best of monarchs falls in the fullness of his glory, the Land of Light becomes exposed to the ravages of its enemies. The contest betwixt Iran and Turan, the Holy Land of Light, and the Wild Region of Darkness, is from this time the centre-point of all subsequent fictions. In the victory of the great Feridun over the wicked Zobak, and his later more unfortunate contest with the fiendlike Afrasiab; in the government which this evil spirit establishes, and the darkness with which the whole empire is now invested, till at length, after a long series of adventures, Afrasiab is conquered by King Chosru, the proper historical founder of the Persian kingdom—in all these fictions, however strange and diversified, we can still perceive, under the guise of heroic legends, a perpetual adherence to the old Persian

ideas concerning the contest between light and darkness. The same spirit breathes in all their other poems, and the same adherence is everywhere perceptible. Now there is no question that a very similar set of ideas, respecting the contest of Light and Darkness—(ideas to which, let it be remembered, the Greeks had nothing parallel) were extremely prevalent in Europe during the middle ages; I might almost say that they were the ruling ideas there, from the moment when the influence of the poetry and allegories of the Scriptures began to be felt. The only difference between the Christian and the Persian systems, with regard to the perpetual contest between Light and Darkness consists in this, that in the former the good Deity is lifted high above all competition with his enemy; while in the latter, the good and the evil principles are represented as being originally distinct and independent powers. But all this lies in a higher region; the distinction is just and great, but it is after all merely metaphysical. Christianity recognises in the world of the senses and in the world of spirits, in nature and in man the perpetual opposition of the good and the evil, the unceasing struggle between Light and Darkness—and this forms the true essence of all the maxims, emblems, and allegories of our religion. We may adopt what opinion we will concerning the origin of all these re-

semblances,—we may view them either as produced by the general identity of human reason, or as the result of simple and unquestioning imitation ; it is evident that from whatever source the coincidence arose, it must have naturally given rise to a kindred set of imaginations and opinions, and to a kindred spirit of poetry in the two peoples among whom it was found.

The later romantic poems of the Persians, such as *Meinun* and *Leila*, *Chosru* and *Schirin*, belong to a species of composition altogether unknown among the ancients, and have a strong resemblance to our European poems of love and chivalry in the middle ages. Yet the flowery and fantastic character of the Oriental imagination has, of course, kept them very far asunder from any European writings, to say nothing of the still more important difference occasioned by the mode in which love and every thing like moral feeling are treated by men brought up in the customs of the East.

If we compare the old French tales and fabliaux with the Arabian tales, we shall have no difficulty in perceiving that the greater part of these fictions had been brought from the East into Europe, in a great measure, it is probable, by the oral narratives of the Crusaders. The small variations which have been introduced, and the colouring of European manners which has so carefully been thrown over them, cannot conceal the identity of the inventions.

At the same time it is by no means unlikely that there was a re-action in the case, and that in those days of unexampled intercourse between the East and the West, many European *novels* may have found their way to the professional story-tellers of the Orientals. But there is no evidence that we ever borrowed any entire heroic fictions from Oriental sources; even the fabulous history of Alexander, although the adventures of the Macedonian form the subject of one of the best of the Persian romances, was not derived to us from that quarter, but from a Greek book of popular legends, and the clothing of chivalrous manners, with which the fiction was afterwards invested, belonged exclusively to ourselves. Something similar occurred in regard to our old legends of the wars of Troy; we derived in like manner our ideas concerning the events of that period, not from the great poets of antiquity, but from another popular book of the same class. Our own age, which is so rich in all historical knowledge, and which holds the first place in every species of elaborate imitation, may indeed look down with great contempt on such rude and childish attempts as these poems which represent the siege of Troy, and other matters of antiquity, under the disguise of chivalrous manners. That dark age, nevertheless, however great may have been its inferiority to our own time in every other

respect, was certainly not without some advantage over us in regard to its comprehension of the character, although not of the costume, of the earlier ages of antiquity. The middle age was the heroic age of Christendom, and in the heroic legends of the Greeks there is much that may recall even to us the manners of chivalry. Tancred and Richard, surrounded with their minstrels and troubadours, stood in many respects in a much nearer relation to Hector and Achilles, and the Trojan rhapsodists, than the field-marshals and poets of a later and more cultivated generation. The achievements of Alexander were made the favourite theme of the romancers, merely because they, of all historical incidents, even without fictitious embellishment, bear the greatest resemblance to heroic traditions, and because the marvellous which they contain is above all the true wonders of other conquerors, akin to that marvellous, which is the delight of poets.

But the approximation of East and West was not the only approximation caused by the Crusades. The nations of the West themselves were brought into closer contact with each other than they had ever before experienced, and the fictions of all ages and all countries became inextricably mingled and confounded. This chaotic mixture was in the end the chief cause why all the best, the most touching, and the most peculiar of the European heroic le-

gends, dissolved themselves into mere play of fancy, and lost all traces of that historical truth upon which they had originally been established.

With regard to the whole body of romantic fictions still extant, whether connected or unconnected with the great subjects of the poetry of the middle age,—even with regard to those which are founded in part on true events, I know only one common standard of criticism. Their value is always so much the higher in proportion as they are more dependent on a historical foundation, more national in their import and character, and more abounding in a free, natural, and unaffected display of imagination,—above all in proportion as they are imbued with the spirit of love. I do not allude merely to a mild, beautifying, and, at the same time, amiable mode of treating every thing that is represented, but rather to that spirit which forms the essential mark of distinction between the fictions of Christendom and all other fictions; which, where a tragical catastrophe is either inseparable from the nature of the subject, or introduced on purpose by the poet, never allows us to close with the single feeling of destruction, oppression, or an inevitable fate—which bids the victim of sorrows and death rise to a higher life with a more glorious presence, and offers to him who is overcome by earthly enemies, or afflictions, the sure prospect of a recom-

pense for all his endurance—a crown of victory in the heavens.)

I shall now direct your attention to the farther developement of the chivalrous poetry, or rather to its speedy corruption and decline among the most illustrious of European nations down to the time of the reformation ; and I shall begin with Germany, because its literature of this age and species, although not the most rich, is at least the best known. I shall postpone to the end my consideration of the Italian literature of this period, because the spirit of chivalry had at no time much dominion or influence on the other side of the Alps, where a peculiar set of tastes and opinions, all leaning towards the antique, had even at this early period, begun to obtain an entire supremacy.

The proper awakening and spring of the present language and poetry of the Germans commenced about the time of Frederick the First, in the 13th century. The first flourishing period was already over at the beginning of the 14th century, but a similar sort of poetry continued to be cultivated, and the language continued to be treated after the same manner, down to the reign of Maximilian. From that time the prose writing was becoming daily more polished, but the art of versifying was ever on the decline, and the language of poetry retrograding into rudeness and barbarity—down to

the commencement of the 16th century, when, in consequence of the universal shaking and disturbance of ideas, there took place a total change in the language, which now forms a complete wall of separation between us and the old German taste in language and poetry. Before the time of Barbarossa, that culture, by which Germany was so much distinguished in the days of the Saxon and earliest Frankish Emperors, was, nevertheless, rather a Latin culture than a Teutonic. It could scarcely, indeed, have been otherwise in the seat of the Imperial Court itself; for that formed the centre-point by which not only Germany, but the half of Italy, the half Romanic-Lotharingia, and the almost entirely Romanic Burgundy, were governed and united; it formed also the scene of almost all the political negotiations of Europe; and, in short, the universal language—the Latin,—was here an instrument of the nearest and the most indispensable necessity. The same circumstances furnish us with an easy explanation how it happened that some of the Emperors themselves, whose affairs must have frequently occasioned them to be long absent from Germany, composed poems in the Romanic dialects;—I allude, in particular, to certain princes of the house of Hohenstaufen, some of whom however were also poets in their native language. The need of a common language of business was indeed sufficiently felt

even within Germany itself; where, in addition to all the native dialects—at that time still extremely separate—(such as the North Dutch and the South Dutch, the Saxon and the Alemannic)—there existed a very considerable population whose language was Sclavonic. With regard to the great improvement which appears in the German language during the reign of the first Frederick, I imagine this was produced, not so much by any immediate exertion or patronage of that monarch himself, as by the general circumstances of the time. Germany began about that period to abound, more than ever, in petty princes—sovereigns whose dominions were too insignificant to occupy the whole of their attention, and who therefore were at full leisure to think of procuring for their courts the ornaments of music, poetry, and the arts. These were the real patrons of German literature. It was thus that such assemblages of poets and minstrels were collected around the courts of the landgraves of Thuringia, and still more of the Austrian Babenbergs. I have little doubt that from some one of these poets, resident in Austria, the *Nibelungenlied* received that form in which we now see it. Not only by the minuteness of his local knowledge, but also by his partiality for Austrian heroes, are the country and residence of the poet betrayed. He goes out of his way to introduce, by a bold anachronism, the Mar-

grave Rudiger—the favourite hero of the Austrians. Even the advantageous manner in which Attila is depicted, may be accounted for somewhat in the same way; for many traditions concerning his achievements have been at all times preserved among the Hungarians; and as these had such a close political connection with Austria, it may be supposed that Attila came to be considered with some degree of partiality, even among the natives of that country. When the Margrave assures Chriembild, who is desirous of espousing a heathen maiden, that “many Christian knights and lords have their “dwelling in the court of Attila,” he says nothing but what is perfectly consistent with historical truth. But it is impossible to avoid being a little amused with another passage, in which it is said, that in Attila’s court men lived either according to Christian or Pagan customs, as it pleased them; for that the prince knew no rule of favour, but rewarded all men according to the valour of their achievements and the virtue of their lives. So strange is the perversity of fiction! The warlike and indefatigable Charlemagne we have already seen represented as an indolent and luxurious sultan; and now we see the conquering and cruel Attila transformed into the likeness of a mild, magnanimous, and tolerating monarch.

The last edition of the *Nibelungen-lied* may, I

think, be placed, with great probability, in the reign of Leopold the Glorious, the last but one of the princes of the house of Babenberg; and if we are anxious that the author of such a poem should not be left without a name, and insist upon connecting it with that of some well known genius, it is, I think, highly probable that the poet was no other than Henry Von Ofterdingen, who was a native of Thuringia, but had his residence in Austria.

This work is not only the most excellent of its time in respect of language; its internal structure is also extremely regular and masterly. It has an almost dramatic conclusion, and is divided into six books: these again are subdivided into smaller sections, cantos, or rhapsodies, with a view, it is probable, to oral recitation or singing. The poet must have adhered with great fidelity to his ancient authorities; for it is remarkable, that he has kept perfectly free of all allusions to the Crusades, although these were the perpetual theme and admiration of all the other poets of his age.

The influence of the Crusades, and of those eastern pilgrimages which were then so prevalent, is, on the contrary, no where more conspicuous than in those very unequal compositions which are classed together under the name of the Helden-buch.

Of the other classes of chivalrous fictions, that of which Charlemagne was the subject were, at first in-

deed, received with great favour among the Germans; but in the sequel, Arthur and the Round Table had completely the advantage. But were I called upon to give a general opinion concerning the merits and defects of all the old German chivalrous poems, I should have no hesitation in saying, that I consider their chief fault to lie in this—that they are all too much composed in the spirit and tone of the love poems—their predecessors. According to my judgment, that would deserve to be considered as the best chivalrous poem, which, being founded originally on history or tradition, should express so much national feeling, and give to its marvellous so much of the character of power and greatness as might entitle it to be considered as a heroic poem, while, on the other hand, it should preserve in the department of feeling, all that beauty, and tenderness, and love, which formed the excellence of the sentimental poetry of the Troubadours. Whether this height of perfection was in reality ever attained by any of those accomplished masters of romantic poetry, who in subsequent times have appeared among the Italians, the English, and the Germans, I shall not take upon me to decide. The poet who appears to be most near it is Torquato Tasso.

There are still extant several German romances, particularly concerning Tristram, which, in their unbroken melody of versification and softness of feel-

ing, are entirely similar to the old poetry of Provence. But of all the German poets of that time, by far the most accomplished master of his art was Wolfram Von Eschenbach:—he has written the histories of the Round Table in a manner superior to any other poet of any country in Europe, and has seized in particular, with the highest success, the idea of that doubly allegorical method of treating them, to which I have above alluded. His hero is at once the type of spiritual warfare, and the ideal of a Templar. In his own days the fame of Wolfram was as great in Germany, as that of Dante was in Italy; and, indeed, he bears no small resemblance to that illustrious poet, both in his propensity to allegories, and in his love of displaying, with some little pedantry, what was in those times a greater rarity than genius itself—his extensive erudition. In respect of his leaning towards an almost oriental fullness of fancy in his descriptive parts, he bears perhaps more resemblance to Ariosto than to any other poet. It is with old poems as with old pictures and statues:—when these are first dug up from some dungeon of concealment, and seen all covered over with the rust and filth of ages, it is not easy to perceive at one view the real excellence which they possess. To comprehend their true merits, we must wait till they are cleaned, and arranged, and inspected at our leisure.

Although I have mentioned that the poetry of Wolfram Von Eschenbach is in some respect a-kin to Dante and Ariosto, I am yet far from admiring the custom of those who are perpetually tracing resemblances between the poets of different countries and ages. These resemblances are in general either insignificant or imaginary, for every true poet is a being by himself. If we must compare the poems of that age to something, let it be, not to the poems of other times, but to the other works of art which were produced in their own time, and in their own country. They resemble in the sublimity of that solitary idea which lies at the bottom of them all, and also in that fullness of ornament which characterises their execution—those monuments of the Gothic architecture which we still survey with a mixed feeling of melancholy, delight, and wonder. Perhaps I might carry the parallel a little farther, and say that the Gothic architecture and the chivalrous poetry have both in a great measure remained ideal, and never been brought to perfection in execution. It may be, that the grandeur of the original conception comes upon us with a stronger impulse from this unfinished work than it might have done had they been adorned with the last exquisite touches of elegance. The terrible graces are ever conversant with the undefined. The spirit of the middle ages has nowhere so powerfully

expressed itself as in those monuments of an architecture whose origin, after all, is unknown to us. I speak of that style of Christian architecture which is characterised by its lofty vaults and arches; its pillars, which have the appearance of being formed out of bundles of reeds; its profusion of ornament; its flowers and leaves—and which is in all these respects essentially distinguished from that elder Christian architecture, whose first and best model is to be found in the church of St Sophia in Constantinople. That it was not invented by the Goths, is now admitted on all hands; for the nation of the Goths had passed away long before any existing specimens of it were formed; and we know that it was not an art which took centuries to perfect it. It leapt at once to perfection, and its oldest monuments are the best. Neither is it in any respect Moorish, or if it be so, in a very inconsiderable degree; for we have many true old Moorish buildings, both in Sicily and in Spain, and these are all marked by a character quite peculiar to themselves. And with regard to the specimens of Gothic architecture which are to be found in the East, these are all, beyond any doubt, of European origin, and exist only in cities and churches which formerly belonged to the Knights of the Temple and of St John. The most flourishing period of this architecture was in the 12th, 13th, and 14th centuries. Its chief seat was originally

in Germany, and German artists constructed, to the admiration of all Italy, the great cathedral of Milan. But it was by no means confined to Germany and the German Netherlands; it flourished, on the contrary, with equal success in England, and in the Northern parts of France. Who was the first inventor of it is entirely unknown; I doubt indeed very much whether it was ever brought to its perfection by any one great architect; for in that case it is difficult to believe that his name could have been utterly forgotten. I am rather of their opinion, who conceive that this system of architecture was perfected and diffused over all Europe by a small society of artists who were very closely connected with each other. But whoever might be the builders, this much is certain, that they were not mere heapers together of stones, but had all thoughts which they meant to embody in their labours. Let a building be ever so beautiful, if it be destitute of *meaning*, it cannot belong to the fine arts. The proper display of purpose, the immediate expression of feeling, is indeed denied to this oldest and most sublime of all the arts; it must excite the feelings through the medium of thought, but perhaps the feelings which it does excite are on that account only so much the more powerful. All architecture is symbolical, but none so much so as the Christian architecture of the

middle age. The first and the greatest of its objects is to express the elevation of holy thoughts, the loftiness of meditation set free from earth, and proceeding unfettered to the heavens. It is this which stamps itself at once on the spirit of the beholder, however little he may himself be capable of analysing his feelings, when he gazes on these far stretching columns and airy domes. But this is not all ; every part of the structure is as symbolical as the whole, and of this we can perceive many traces in all the writings of the times. The altar is directed towards the rising of the sun, and the three great entrances are meant to express the conflux of worshippers from all the regions of the earth. Three towers express the Christian mystery of the triune Godhead. The choir rises like a temple within a temple with redoubled loftiness. The shape of the cross is in common with the Christian churches even of the earlier times. The round arch was adopted in the earlier Christian architecture, but laid aside on account of the superior gracefulness supposed to result from the crossing of four arches. The rose is the essential part of all the ornament of this architecture ; even the shape of the windows, doors, and towers, may be traced to it, as well as all the accompanying decoration of flowers and leaves. When we view the whole structure, from the crypt to the choir, it is im-

possible to resist the idea of earthly death leading only to the fulness, the freedom, the solemn glories of eternity.

I have said this much merely to point out in passing, how widely they err who despise indiscriminately the works and the spirit of the middle ages. They who do so are in general little acquainted with the works, and altogether incapable of comprehending the spirit of a period so remote from their own.

In the 14th and 15th centuries the tendency of the Germans was chiefly to moral didactic poems, partly of allegorical, partly of satirical import. Of this the fable book of *Reineke Fuchs* may be cited as an example; and in truth if we would see a clear and precise picture of the course of human affairs in those ages, I know not any other book from which we may learn so much of all these things as from this. The witty author has contrived with great adroitness to let us see that the fox, whose success he represents among the animals, is only the type of that cunning which was in those days found to be the true road to preferment, both among knights and burghers. The chivalrous poetry of a former age erred in entirely departing from history, and becoming a mere display of imagination; the poets now ran into the opposite extreme, and composed regular chronicles in rhyme. Thus the two

elements of true heroic poetry were given not in conjunction but in detail. The two last considerable specimens of our elder poetry are to be found in the celebrated romances which were both published, one of them perhaps in a great measure composed, by the Emperor Maximilian; the one of these is in prose, the other in verse. Both of these books are valuable on account of the spirit with which they are animated; but the half-allegorical half-historical mode of composition then in fashion, was, it is probable, extremely unfavourable to the noble genius of Maximilian—the last of the old Germans.

The spirit of chivalry remained nowhere so long in all its active purity as in France and England, but the chivalrous poetry of those countries became very soon corrupted, and that even before it had time to reach any high degree of perfection in its developement. In France it degenerated into long prose romances, which were quite destitute of the spirit of the ancient minstrelsy. In England its fate was more favourable; for although it was reduced to compositions of no great extent, these undoubtedly were well qualified to take fast hold of the mind, and preserve alive the feelings of chivalry in the bosoms of the people. The French, indeed, are not without their old songs and ballads, and many of them are distinguished by great tenderness

of feeling; but neither in quality nor in quantity can they for a moment be compared with the popular poetry of the English—more particularly of the Scots; they are as much inferior to them as the Northern French love-poems of a former age were to those of the Provincial Troubadours. Among the original poets of this old French time, Thibault, Count of Champagne, and King of Navarre, appears to be entitled to a high place—perhaps to the very first. The fictitious histories of Charlemagne and the Round Table were first composed in the French language, either after Latin authorities, or from the traditions of the vulgar. But in every department of literature which flourished in France, England also had her share, and, to understand this with propriety, we must take into our consideration what was the political situation of France at that period. Provence we must consider altogether by itself, for not only had it a language of its own, but it was also a fee of the empire, belonging to Burgundy, and the flourishing state of Provincial poetry commenced from the time when Frederick Barbarossa gave its investiture to the Count Berengar. The Northern and Eastern provinces of France, on the other hand, were under the government of England; and in truth the whole chivalry and chivalrous poetry, both of the

French and the English, may be said to have belonged of right not to them but to the Normans.

Of the first progress of the French language, the celebrated *Roman de la Rose* gives, in spite of all its fame, no very advantageous impression. The French literature of the 14th century is indeed extremely poor; but from the romances and what other productions of that period we have in our hands, it appears that the language had at that time a character very inferior in every respect to the cotemporary dialects of Spain and Italy. The French language never assumed its proper shape till long afterwards. Nor was the case very different in England, where all the knowledge and genius of Chaucer could not introduce either uniformity into the language, or nature into the feelings of his countrymen. It is probable that the long wars between France and England, during the 14th and 15th centuries, and the bloody feuds of York and Lancaster, prevented, in a great measure, the natural progress both of language and poetry in the two countries. That much of the literature of that age has perished there is every reason to believe; but to judge from what remains, as the riches of the English consisted in ballads, so that of the French consisted in fabliaux and little tales or novels; these were in a great measure the fountains

from which Boccacio drew his fictions, and indeed they wanted only a style like his to procure for them that honour which is due to the rich imagination of their inventors.

But even in this early age of French literature, it is easy to perceive a strong tendency to the same species of writing which is the most peculiar and original, and which has since become the richest of all its possessions. I mean those historical memoirs of particular men or times, in which there is displayed, with so much liveliness, the spirit of social observation, and which in their portraitures of manners, and their minuteness of finishing, bear a considerable resemblance to romance writing. The first of these compositions (which form the most valuable part of French literature) is the work of the faithful servant and friend of St Louis, the Sieur de Joinville.

The literature of Spain possesses a high advantage over that of most other nations, in its historical heroic romance of the Cid. This is exactly that species of poetry which exerts the nearest and the most powerful influence over the national feelings and character of a people. A single work, such as the Cid, is of more real value to a nation than a whole library of books, however abounding in wit or intellect, which are destitute of the spirit of nationality. Although in the shape in which it now

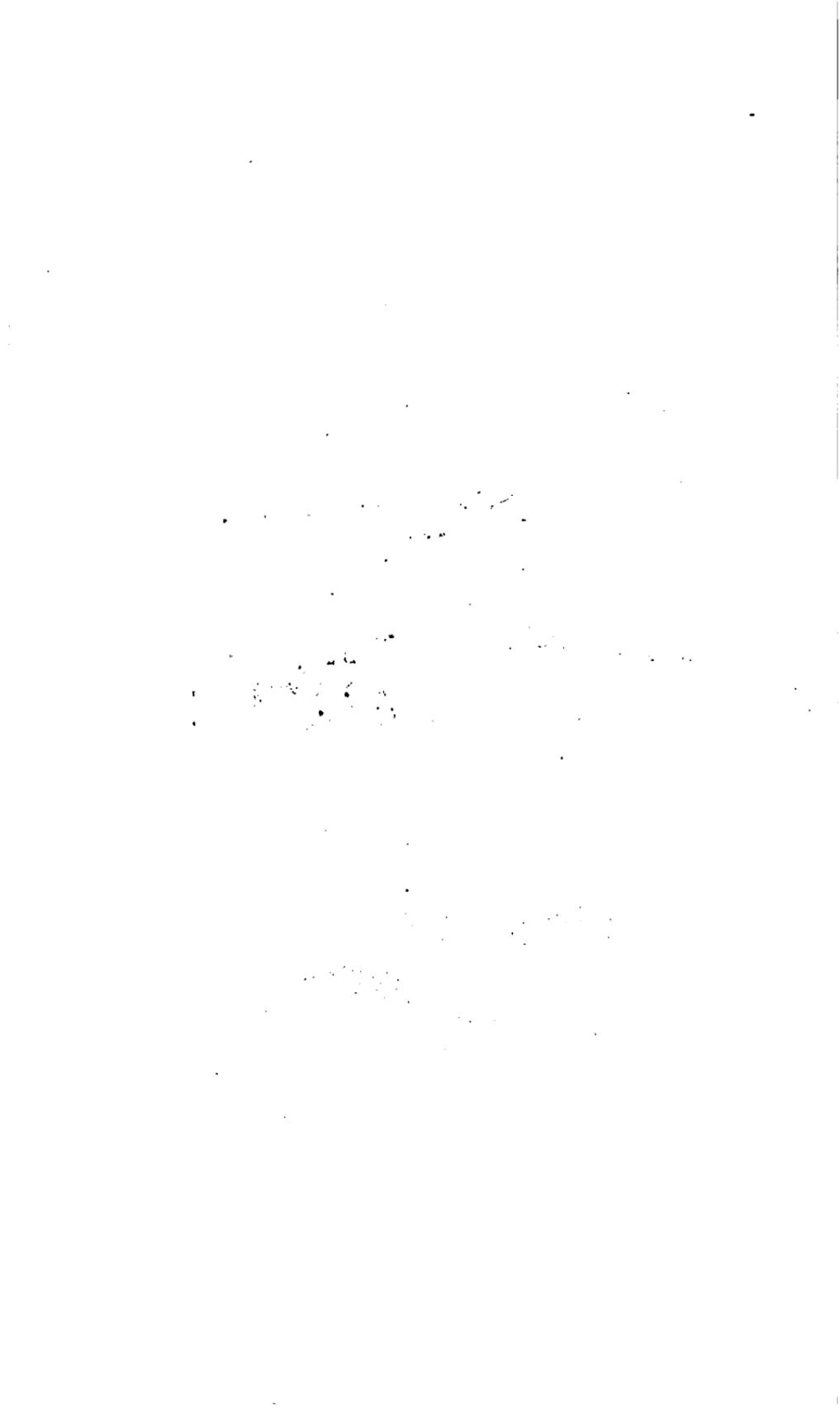
appears the work was probably produced about the 11th century, yet the whole body of its inventions belongs to the older period antecedent to the Crusades. There is here no trace of that oriental taste for the wonderful and the fabulous which afterwards became so predominant. It breathes the pure, true-hearted, noble old Castilian spirit, and is in fact the true history of the Cid, first arranged and extended into a poetical form, very shortly, it is probable, after the age of that hero himself. I have already taken notice that the heroic poetry and mythology of almost all nations is in its essence tragical and elegiac. But there is another less serious view of the heroic life, which was often represented even by the ancients themselves. Hercules and his bodily strength, and his eating, are drawn in the true colours of comedy, and the wandering adventures and lying stories of Ulysses, have been the original of all amusing romances. But, in truth, specimens of this sort of representation are to be found in the histories of almost all great heroes. However powerfully history may represent the hero's superiority in magnanimity, in bravery, and in corporeal strength, it effects its purpose by depicting him not among the poetical obscurities of a world of wonders, but surrounded by the realities of life; and it is then that we receive the strongest impression of his power, when we see it exerted

in opposition, not to imaginary evils of which we have little conception, but to the every-day difficulties and troubles of the world, to which we ourselves feel that ordinary men are incapable of offering any resistance. We have many instances of this comic sort of writing in the Spanish Cid; for example, there is the description of his rather unfair method of raising money to support his war against the Moors, by borrowing from a Jewish usurer and leaving a chest of old stones and lumber as his pledge; and the account of the insult offered to his dead body by another of that race, and the terror into which he was thrown by the Cid starting up on his bier, and drawing his sword a span's length out of the scabbard. These are touches of popular humour by no means out of place in a romance founded on popular traditions. But there is a spirit of more delicate irony in those sorrowful lamentations with which *Donna Ximena* is made to address the King on account of the protracted absence of her husband, as well as in the reply of the Monarch. The romances translated into our language by Herder are much later in date, but still preserve in great purity the character of the ancient fictions. They abound also in a very peculiar simplicity of expression and feeling, which are not so perceptible in the somewhat careless translation of our great critic.

The Spaniards are as rich in ballads as the Eng-

lish and Scotch ; but theirs are possessed of certain peculiar excellencies to which the others have no pretension. They are not only popular ballads, intelligible and clear to the vulgar, they are also true national and heroic poems, which may be read with the highest admiration by the most refined critics. Popular ballads are in general a sort of lamentations over an antiquity of greatness more favourable for the poet. But it is always to be regretted when that poetry, whose business it is to keep alive the national feelings of a whole people, assumes a form which adapts it only for the vulgar. Such poetry has, moreover, this disadvantage, that it is its inevitable fate to become every day more unintelligible even to those for whose use it is formed. In general, however, poems of this sort are to be found in the greatest abundance among nations possessed of truly poetical feelings, whose legends, traditions, and national recollections, have been interrupted or mutilated by long protracted civil wars, or by some universal revolution and concussion of opinions.

END OF VOLUME I.



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